



Continuity Girl is the latest addition to the series of Career Novels under the general editorship of Mary Dunn, the well-known author and reviewer of children's books.

There are one or two jobs which have a glamorous and exciting reputation—and really live up to it. Being a Continuity Girl means very hard work, standing for long hours, a cool head and a ready wit, but it's a job in a million. If you can somehow force your way in, and it is difficult because there are so few opportunities and a lot of competition, you will have the chance of an enviable career with a high salary. You will be behind the scenes of film making and you will have your own vital part to play. Not only will you travel to all parts of the world at a moment's notice, meet all the famous movie stars and know them by their first names, but, as soon as one film is finished, you will be away on another, new places, new stars, a new director. Angela Mack tells the story, step by step, of a girl who wants to be a Continuity Girl, her first defeated efforts, her chance, and then shows her working on the set of a big technicolour period film. Against the background of a London studio we meet some of the staff, technicians and real-life actors and learn something of how a full length feature film is made.

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CONTINUITY GIRL

A Mary Dunn Career Novel

CAREER NOVELS
General Editor, MARY DUNN



YOUNG NURSE CARTER
Shirley Darbyshire

NURSE CARTER MARRIED
Shirley Darbyshire

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Evelyn Forbes

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SONIA—BACK STAGE
Laurence Meynell

TRAVELS OF A NURSERY NURSE
Beatrice Lloyd

SHEILA GOES GARDENING
Louise Cochrane





CONTINUITY GIRL

BY
Angela Mack

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Chapter I

New Horizons

"WELL, somebody has got to do it. Who's going to volunteer?"

Mr. Milne looked hopefully round the table at his family.

Mrs. Milne smiled and said she would have done it if she hadn't promised to go to Rottingdean that afternoon.

John Milne felt he was exempt as it was a Saturday afternoon and the first cricket match of the season was being played.

Frances' younger sister said she had done it every afternoon that week except Wednesday, when the nurse came.

"Somebody has got to be ready to answer the door, and the first patient is due at half-past two," repeated their father firmly.

Everyone looked at Frances.

"Well, I'll do it then. How many patients are there?"

"Only three. Half-past two, three o'clock and half-past three."

"Surely Gertrude used to do it?"

"Yes, before you went away, but now she only comes in the mornings. I told you, dear," said her mother, "it's too expensive to have her all day."

"One of them, the three o'clock one, is Mrs. Birch."

"Oh, no!" said Frances. "Now I know why nobody wants to answer the door!"

"Show her straight into the waiting-room and don't get involved," said her father.

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"How can she do that?" said Mrs. Milne. "You know she hasn't seen Frances since she went to the States; she'll want to know everything."

"The Glassbrook family call her 'Twenty Questions,'" volunteered John. "And they live next door to her, poor things. What's the matter with her, anyway?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Mr. Milne sternly.

"Well, let's hope she's got a gall bladder, at least. You might lop a bit off her tongue while you've got her under the anaesthetic," said John.

"That will do, thank you," said his father. "Now hurry up, please, I want the dining-room cleared and the smell of food out of the way. The first one will be here in twenty minutes."

He stalked out of the dining-room into his consulting-room, already changing from his usual genial mood as father to the brusque aloof dignity of his profession. As consulting surgeon and member of the staff of a big hospital in Brighton, nurses had been known to turn pale at a cold glance from him in the operating theatre. The family had heard that if a nurse made the smallest mistake he was liable to scorch her up in a flame of temper and refuse to have her on duty in the theatre again. He very seldom lost his temper at home, and it was difficult for the family to appreciate the authority of his position at the hospital, where his word was a royal command in the feudal hierarchy of its dedicated world.

Frances helped to clear away, thinking, as she had done for the whole week since her return to England, how extraordinary it was to be back in this home atmosphere which she might almost never have left. They were exactly the same, just one year older, whereas she felt herself to be completely altered by her experiences and right out of touch with her family.

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The chance to go to the States to do a secretarial job for the American branch of an English literary agency had turned up out of the blue almost exactly this time last year. She remembered standing by this same window, looking down over the garden to the gap between the houses where the sea shimmered, as it did today, in the pale spring sunshine, wondering if she would be a fool to miss the chance. Perhaps she had been a fool to go. Now all her ideas had been changed; she felt she had become wildly ambitious, yet for what? She knew she could not be content again with her old job and its nine-to-six routine. But what was she to do? In her heart she knew the basic trouble had been Hank.

She had met Hank at a crazy party—one of those parties you could be invited to in New York by someone who was a friend of a person you had met for five minutes at someone else's party. Hank had charmed her at once. Looking back at the easy way he got on terms with her—when they didn't even know each other's names—Frances realised how much practice must have gone into that smooth routine. But she didn't feel that at the time; she fell for it.

He had been a wonderful companion, always fun to be with, always crackling with exciting plans for a fast and entertaining life. Foolishly, but helplessly, she had begun to visualise life just going on and on with him, and seriously in love for the first time, she inevitably began to imagine the sort of life she would lead as his wife. He had a wonderful job as a sound recordist to a film company who made short films for television. He had, to Frances' eyes, a completely luxurious flat, whose orange and white kitchen was an advertisement photographer's dream. And, to complete the pleasant life, he had a car which was vulgar in its scarlet magnificence, in which he whisked her to a fabulous party

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on Long Island, to the newest theatre musical and into Canada for one glorious week of ski-ing.

Frances knew she had been the victim of the dazzle technique, but the really unhappy part of it was that, quite apart from his worldly trappings, Hank was a clever and stimulating person. Life would never have become a bore with him, she was sure; he had more than his share of brains and common sense to let the search for pleasure dull his appetite or his ambition. What had gone wrong?

Waiting for the first patient to ring the front door bell, she went back in her mind over what had happened. Had she been too "English" in her refusal to spend all her time with him? She thought he would respect her more for it but he became discontented, saying that all women were the same, out to get everything they could grab without giving anything in exchange. But in spite of her terrible misery at the time, she knew she had been right. If he had loved her enough to want her to marry him he would have grown to respect her point of view. It looked too much as if he considered her as just the girl of the moment who must say thank you for all the time and money he had spent on her, before he moved on to someone new. It hadn't taken him long. As the noise of the bell buzzed in the box in the kitchen, Frances knew that the most hateful moment of all had been when she saw the sleek-haired girl in the ski-jacket sitting beside him in the wide red car.

She showed the first patient into the dining-room, which had been quickly turned into the waiting-room, with magazines, old and new, laid out upon the polished table.

And I was even stupid enough to imagine myself driving that car one day, she thought, and, like a part

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owner, kept a compact and a box of tissues in the passenger "tidy" under the dashboard. She wondered whose property was stowed there now?

* * *

Mrs. Birch was at the top of her form.

"Well, *Frances*! When did you get back? Did you come on the *Queen Mary*? Tourist class? What was it like? How much did it cost? What was the job like? Meet anyone interesting? Boy friends? *Not* engaged? Did you buy much? That dress you're wearing doesn't look English. Was your salary good there? Nice flat? Of course, they call them apartments there, don't they? Silly of me! You look well. Have a good time on board ship? Shipboard romance? Don't tell me, I'm sure I can guess! What are you going to do now? Back to your old job? What's John going to do now he's left school? Your sister's got a boy-friend, I hear! Serious? . . ."

Frances stood in the doorway, as nearly poised for flight as she could be without appearing rude. The torrent was diverted when her father appeared in the door of his consulting-room and drew the fire to himself.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Birch. Would you like to come in?"

The noise of her ceaseless chatter could be heard, even with the door shut. Frances escaped upstairs, determined to be out of earshot when the time came for her to go.

* * *

"I'm glad it's still cold enough to have a fire. It's the one thing I miss in the summer," said Frances' mother after dinner. "I do hate gazing at that ghastly firescreen I made. I suppose you had only electric fires in your flat?"

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"It was centrally heated," said Frances. "There was one bar you could turn on in the sitting-room, but I hardly ever used it. It was like living in a hothouse."

"How gorgeous!" said her sister Pauline. "Could you really wear thin clothes indoors in winter?"

"Yes, everyone does. I revelled in it at first, but I didn't like it after a bit. It was too hot, even when I learnt to adjust it a bit, and Babs, the girl I shared the flat with, would never allow me to open a window, she said she was frightened of catching cold. I began to feel my skin seal over, if you know what I mean. It's heavenly to come in to, out of the cold; you feel the warmth creeping slowly all over you, beginning in the small of the back, but if you stay indoors too long I think it's unhealthy."

"Well, give me the chance to be that sort of unhealthy," said Pauline. "Where's John?"

"He's gone out, as usual," said her mother. "You looked poised for flight, too?"

"Yes, I'm going to see 'Golden Samarkand'."

"Good gracious! I thought you went to the pictures last night."

"Yes, we did, but tonight's the last night of this and we must see it, Gerald Fork is in it. I can't wait. 'Bye."

Pauline shrugged herself casually into her duffle coat, shook out her pony tail and was off without even a glance in the tall mirror which hung in the hall, banging the front door after her.

"What's this Peter like?" asked Frances, feeling suddenly old and elder-sisterish. A year ago, Pauline had still been at school, now she seemed to have usurped Frances' place as the young lady of the household for whom the telephone was always ringing. Frances felt sere with age, comparing her twenty-two years with Pauline's eighteen. She knew that the lives of all her

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old friends had moved on without her, as she had grown away from them, and she felt sad and out of touch with all the things she had once so much enjoyed.

Her mother was giving Peter's life history and saying how serious she thought the affair might be and how highly unsuitable a companion he was for Pauline, and how she was only just preventing herself from putting her foot down.

The telephone rang in the consulting-room. Frances leapt up gladly to answer it.

"Where's Pop? it's for him," she said, appearing again in the sitting-room doorway.

"He's in the hut, I think," said her mother, looking up from the cushion cover she was making.

Frances laughed to herself; here was another sign that she was really back. Her father was always to be found, working doggedly at his large collection of stamps, in the garden hut which had first been whitewashed and turned into a playroom for them when they were children and then into a study for her father, and it was here that he spent all his spare time.

He looked in on them a few minutes later.

"I've got to go up to the hospital—a strangulated hernia and a couple of appendices. Shan't be long."

"Oh, dear, how tiresome, you'll miss the Fray Family. Shall I watch it and tell you what happens?"

"Thanks," said her father briefly, and was gone.

The Fray Family serial was the only television programme her father ever watched, and he was furious if he missed an instalment, which he frequently did, as he was quite often called to the hospital on the one night it was on.

"Bother," said her mother, "it bores me to death and I can never remember it properly afterwards. Still, he does so enjoy it."

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"It's infantile," said Frances. "Why does he like it so?"

"I wish I knew," said her mother, and they both laughed in complete understanding. For a moment they seemed much closer together and Frances was suddenly tempted to tell her about Hank and all her hopes and unhappiness, but her mother, sensing that closeness, forestalled her.

"I don't think you look so well as you did before you went away. Is anything the matter?"

"No," said Frances, the opportunity lost.

"When are you going back to Dr. Long? I met him in the town the other day and he's most anxious for you to come back. The girl he had while you were away has been making a muddle of sending out the accounts and has upset some of his patients."

"I couldn't possibly go back to Dr. Long," said Frances firmly.

Her mother looked up anxiously.

"But you've got to have a job—what are you going to do? And Dr. Long is *so* nice, and he sends your father a lot of work."

Frances felt trapped. How can I possibly explain, she thought, that I can't go on living in Brighton and doing all the old things over and over again until I shrivel into an old maid. I've got to get away again. But how?

"And I met Simon outside the Pavilion a few days ago and he asked me when you were coming back."

"I don't want to see Simon again, thank you," said Frances harshly.

"Why not? He's *so* nice. He's working very hard for his finals. He'll be a qualified architect next year. I believe he's going into his uncle's firm."

"And you've got it all fixed up in your mind what a

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nice husband he'd make for me, so suitable! Perhaps you even know what his income will be?"

Frances spilt all her depression and disappointment into her words. Her mother looked shocked.

"Something's the matter with you, Frances, you're not a bit the same. I think it was a mistake to let you take that job in New York."

"No one *let* me do anything. I do, have done, and will do, exactly what I want to do."

Their pleasant *tête-à-tête* was deteriorating fast into an angry quarrel. Frances felt prepared to fight to the death, without quite knowing why, but the telephone interrupted them.

"May I speak to Miss Frances Elizabeth Hungerford Milne?" said a woman's voice.

Frances jumped with pleasure. It was Violetta Forbes, a girl she had met on the boat.

"Hello, yes, it's me. How *are* you?"

"Fine, just fine. Fran, honey, can you join me on Thursday evening? I'm having a little party—mostly colleagues, but I'd just love it if you could come."

"I'd simply adore to, Violetta. Wait though; how late will the party be, as I've got to get the last train back?"

"Oh, don't do that, it might go on. Stay over night here. You're not working yet, are you?"

"No, I'm not, I'm absolutely free."

"Well, then, that's fixed. O.K. by you?"

"Wonderful!" They continued to chat until the pips started. "What time shall I arrive?" asked Frances.

"When you like. I'm back from the office at half after six," she shouted. "See you then."

"O.K.," screamed back Frances. "Goodbye."

She put back the receiver with delight. Violetta was charming, slightly mad and bursting with life. She and

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Frances had liked each other immediately they had met and, looking back, she realised how dull the journey home would have been without her. They had exchanged telephone numbers on the last day, but Frances felt sure it was just a boat friendship and that she would be unlikely to see her again. A call from her, and so soon, was therefore all the more pleasing. Frances felt a warm feeling shoot through her that, perhaps, life was not going to leave her high and dry on Brighton beach after all.

Chapter 2

A Cocktail Party

VIOLLETTA's flat was above a dress shop in Heath Street, Hampstead. This tiny lane, with its eighteenth-century air, is lined on both sides with small shops, some genuinely old, some faithful copies, complete with bow-fronted windows with here and there a boss-eyed pane like the bottom of an old glass bottle. It was once a village street in the days of the Prince Regent; now it is the despair of the Hampstead police, since it has become one of the main routes out of the middle of London, unaltered in width since it was made to take just two carriages abreast.

Frances was just going to ring the bell of No. 24, when Violetta called her from the street.

"Have you been waiting long, Fran? I'm awfully sorry," and she opened the door with her key.

"No, no, I've only just come, and anyway I'm early. How are you? Now what can I do?"

They mounted a steep staircase leading straight up from the door, without even a pretence of a hall. Violetta was carrying armfuls of awkward-looking packages which she dumped at once on the kitchen table, the first room they came to at the head of the stairs. There was also a charming hall, papered in striped white and grey, a large bedroom, a very tiny one, a bathroom, and the sitting-room which had two windows directly above the shop and looked down upon the old street and the racing traffic.

"What a perfect little flat," said Frances. "How did you find it?"

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“Influence,” said Violetta, laughing. “It costs a howling fortune—everything does now in this area. Anyone in the film business or who writes, paints or is in anyway remotely connected with the arts nourishes a secret passion to live in old Hampstead, with the exciting result for anyone who owns property here that they can sit back and live on their rents for the rest of their idle days!”

“I’ve never seen such a kitchen,” said Frances, “except in New York.” They were unpacking some of the parcels on the red and white top of the kitchen table. The walls were lined with cupboards painted stark white on the outside and scarlet inside, so that the glass, china, kitchen wear and glass jars stood out in clear relief against the red background.

“Do you remember that man who wrote *The Black Fox*? He used to live here when he worked on scripts at Shepperton. That book made a fortune for him and he spent some of it here and then went off to live in California.”

“This script-reading job of yours, is it fun?”

“Well, yes and no. It’s quite well paid, you meet amusing people, but in the main it’s fairly heavy going. Almost every book published seems to be sent in by the hopeful authors or agents, who are all dead certain their book is a cinch for a great film if only a director can see it. We sift out the hopefules and possibles and pass them on. That’s it, more or less.”

While they talked, Frances was busy spreading *pâté* on rounds cut from a French loaf while Violetta arranged olives and anchovies in little glass finger-bowls and unwrapped some ridiculously tiny savoury sandwiches which she had prepared that morning and wrapped in a plastic bag.

They carried the food through into the little

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Regency sitting-room, with the fireplace at the far end, hung with old prints of London and wall-papered in the same stripes as the hall.

"You've arranged these prints delightfully," said Frances. "I love this room. I'd give everything to have a flat like this. I've got to admit to being foully jealous!"

Violetta laughed.

"Well, Fran, what're you going to do? Get a nice job and I'll help you look for a flat."

"Oh, I don't know what I'm going to do. Something secretarial in London, I suppose. I couldn't take the family any more."

"You seemed mighty keen to get home on the boat coming over."

"Yes, well, it was lovely seeing them again, but I've somehow moved on. Do you know what I mean?"

"Growing up, honey," said Violetta cheerfully, pouring some gin into the cocktail shaker. "We all get it."

"Don't you miss your family?"

"I guess it was good to see them this year, but I was surely glad to get back to London. Toronto's kind of 'young'. I love my home but I love this life more."

Violetta stood in the doorway with a bottle of French Vermouth in one hand. She had long slender legs and her movements were graceful.

"Come and put your things in your bedroom. I've been working you like a black. Have a wash and then I'll treat you like a guest."

Frances laughed. She felt very lighthearted. As before on the boat, she sensed something of the adventurous and gay life which surrounded Violetta. She

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put her mood of depression away and determined to enjoy herself.

* * *

The flat began filling up with strange people. At first Frances was introduced to everyone as they came in in ones and twos, but after a while it got out of hand and Violetta was too busy rushing round filling glasses, passing plates, finding cigarettes, pausing to talk, and Frances had to fend for herself.

"Are you in this racket?" a slender blond young man asked her. He had an ash-white skin and very long fingers which he waved all over the place to give point to his flamboyant remarks. Anyone seemed to serve as audience and his egocentric notions tumbled out in an absurdly exaggerated Oxford accent. Frances finally escaped by going to find him a drink and forgetting to go back. He seemed to have had plenty to drink already, but she noticed him a few moments later helping himself to a large glass of Violetta's gin without being asked.

Frances was wondering whom to speak to next when she noticed a dark girl standing by herself looking furiously angry. She had an attractive face with an olive skin and large brown eyes, and was smartly dressed in what looked like a very expensive dress of softly draped grey jersey. Frances went up to her to offer her a cigarette.

She took one without saying anything, after a glance at Frances which seemed to dismiss her as being of no interest. Frances was piqued.

"Are you in the film business?" she asked, determined to get some response.

"Yes, I am," the girl said, opening her eyes wide and looking at Frances with a disdainful expression.

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"Are you on the script side, too?"

"Good gracious, no; I'm in publicity."

Here was an odd person, Frances thought. She had said "publicity" as though it were the only possible thing to be in and anything else simply too plebeian for words.

"What film are you working on at the moment?"

"It's called 'Devil's Children', but I'm afraid I can't tell you anything more about it."

"Why is that?"

"We simply don't talk about the films while they're in production to anyone outside the studio."

Frances thought this was odd if she was in publicity. Surely, she thought, there was always an immense amount of gossip in all the newspaper film columns about what was being made and where?

The girl's eyes were wandering round the room. She looked more petulant than ever. Then she apparently found the person she was looking for, and without a glance or another word she walked away from Frances towards a man standing by the fireplace. Frances was left looking after her, wondering if she had ever met anyone quite so rude in her life.

The evening wore on but the noise did not abate, rather it seemed to increase in volume and it became more and more difficult to make oneself heard. Frances began to reach the stage where she wondered if she were enjoying herself. Her throat felt rough after several hours of shouted conversation and she felt she could not bear to drink another thing.

In the kitchen she found Violetta preparing some more cocktail. "Come and meet Elizabeth," she said. "You'll like her. She's a continuity girl."

A girl of medium height stood by the long cherry velvet curtain of one of the sitting-room windows. She

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had a pale intelligent face with very little make-up and her hair was drawn straight back from her forehead and held by a tortoiseshell band.

She seemed a friendly person, so after a few minutes Frances asked her to explain exactly what it meant to be a continuity girl. Elizabeth explained that you were responsible for co-ordinating the details of each shot with the next, even though they might be filmed out of sequence. Most of it went over Frances' head but she liked Elizabeth. She liked her natural, straight, normal way of speaking, it was a great relief after so much artificiality. Frances relaxed and forgot to strain after clever remarks and they had a long conversation about America. Elizabeth had been to New York twice. Frances told her about her job there and how she was now looking for a job in London.

The Oxford accent joined them, patted Elizabeth on the head and told Frances she ought to become a continuity girl.

"Travel round the world, all expenses paid, fabulous salary, hobnob with the stars, what more could a girl ask for?" he said, in his cheerful, mocking voice.

Elizabeth smiled at him like an indulgent parent; it was clear that his exaggerated mannerisms did not annoy her.

"It's very difficult to get into films nowadays," she said. "When I went in, twelve years ago, there were no unions or I should never have got in. But if you are seriously thinking of it, I'll give you all the help I can."

Frances thanked her. She hadn't thought of it at all, but didn't like to say so. It all seemed a world away from anything she knew.

Someone started putting on records and the groups divided to leave a space in the centre of the room. Two or more couples started dancing and Violetta asked

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Frances to hand round some more drinks. The noise did not seem to lessen but grew louder to compete with the music. A short man with a little pointed beard opened one of the windows to let some of the smoke out. He asked Frances to dance but as he could not see over her shoulder and steered her into everyone else in the room they soon gave it up and acknowledged defeat.

"I say," he said desperately, "can I get you a drink?"

"No, thank you," said Frances.

"A cigarette then?" he said eagerly.

While he was escaping, Frances sat on the arm of a chair at one side of the fire.

She turned round and, as bad luck would have it, the person on the other arm was none other than the haughty girl who had put paid to Frances' attempts at friendliness earlier in the evening.

"You're trying to get into the film business, I suppose?" she said to Frances, who was purposely keeping quiet.

It was on the tip of Frances' tongue to say she wouldn't dream of it, but she felt thoroughly unpractised at being rude to people and didn't think she could bring it off.

"I haven't really thought what I want to do yet," she said instead.

"Well, I shouldn't bother to try films if I were you."

"Why is that?" said Frances, annoyed.

"You can only get in if you've got a lot of influence with the top people. For anyone else it's simply a waste of time."

As she said this, she looked with venom at Frances as if she might at any moment try and take her own job

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away from her. She then got up, as before, and walked away to speak to someone else without another word.

Through a haze of smoke, slight weariness and a lot of cocktail, Frances wondered why she hadn't managed to reply to this sort of behaviour in kind. If I were a man, she thought, I would take her outside and knock her down.

Chapter 3

Double Event

IT was a quarter to two in the morning and the last shouting guest had gone. The noise of their good-byes, car doors slamming, engines racing and laughter must have woken most of Hampstead's respectable citizens. Frances was amused to think of her father's reaction, as he was always meticulously careful of other people's rights and moved on tiptoe if he had to go out in the middle of the night, running his car down the hill and slipping it into gear when he met the cross-roads of the London Road.

She surveyed the mess in the sitting-room. Violetta threw open all the windows and went out, reappearing in a moment wearing a red and white checked apron.

"Do leave this," said Frances. "I can do it all easily in the morning after you've gone."

"No, no, no," said Violetta. "It's one of my fiercest principles—*everything* has to be cleared up and the place restored to normal immediately. Otherwise I shouldn't sleep."

"Good gracious. What a fetish! Do let me do it for you—you'll be so tired in the morning and I've nothing whatever to do."

"Nonsense," said Violetta firmly, collecting all the sticky, fingered glasses on a tray. "This is the part I like best, restoring order to chaos. Pile all the plates on the right-hand draining-board—any remaining bits of food shove in the 'frig. This all has to be done by numbers! Anyway, you shouldn't say you've nothing to

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do. Why don't you start looking for a job in the morning?"

"Well, I . . ."

"Well, Fran? What about it? Let's tackle the question while we wash up."

Polishing the glasses as they were placed upside down, rinsed and sparkling from the foaming hot water, Frances wondered if perhaps, after all, it might not be such a bad idea to look for a job straight away.

"And as I said before," said Violetta, "you can stay here with pleasure until you find a flat. Obviously you must get away from Brighton if you feel so out of it there."

"But it might take ages to find a nice job," said Frances.

"Well, why don't you take any old job, the first that comes along and then try for something more interesting. You'll be living in London then and earning some money, and anyway, they always say it's much easier to find another job when you're in one already."

"I suppose you're right. What worries me is that I've no strong ambitions. Obviously I'd like to get into something really worthwhile, but I've no particular talents. Look at you, for instance, you've always wanted to write and you're busy building a very nice career for yourself step by step."

"Thanks," said Violetta, a little ruefully. "Agreed I make a little money out of journalism, but as for writing the great film script—that's my sleeping-beauty dream!"

"Yes, but you've always wanted a job along one line, haven't you? I simply have no bent in any direction whatsoever. It's rather a lost feeling—you must understand."

"I do," said Violetta, rinsing the scarlet washing-up

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bowl and taking another cloth to help with the drying. "But I see it as widening your field of opportunity, not narrowing it. What do you really want to aim for—just one secretarial job after another or to get your foot on to a ladder?"

"I don't know," said Frances, thinking of Hank.

"Now where did I put today's *Times*? Ah, ha, here it is. I'll make us a night-cap while you go and sit by the fire and study the 'Sits. Vac.' "

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"Hello? I apologise for ringing instead of writing, but I'm in London for the day and I saw the advertisement in yesterday's *Times* and wondered if I might make an appointment?"

Frances felt quite mad. It was something to do with the marvellous May morning, Violetta's spirited companionship and her own sudden determination to enjoy life and forget the past.

"Would you hold on a moment, please?"

Frances looked out through the windows of the telephone box in Cadogan Square. The trees were at their most beautiful, their leaves fully shaken out to meet the summer. It was still early and people were crossing the square to get to their offices. One or two girls, Frances noticed, had been bold enough to wear cotton frocks. The bustle and busyness of London fascinated her, she felt she wanted to grow into it, to belong to it and not just see it from the outside or associate it only with special events, as she had done as a child.

"Would eleven o'clock suit you?"

"Yes, very well," said Frances to the unknown voice. "Whom shall I ask for?"

"Oh, just come into the Gallery, we're all here."

They sounded friendly. Frances wondered what they

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were going to be like. The advertisement had been short but to the point: "Secretary/Receptionist wanted for Bond Street Art Gallery. Hours 10-4.30. Write 'Wildfire Galleries', 129 New Bond Street."

It was after half-past nine, so she had over an hour to wait. She walked down Cadogan Gardens and went into the kitchen department of Peter Jones' to try and find a small "thank-you" present for Violetta.

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The "Wildfire Galleries" apparently believed in leaving modern art well alone. Their windows were filled with pastoral scenes of cows wading to their knees in limpid pools, or impossibly clean-looking flaxen-haired children fondling sheep, and all were framed solidly and ponderously in gold.

The proprietor was a small man of extremely dapper appearance. He had a cheerful, friendly face and put Frances at her ease at once.

"Can you keep books?" he asked.

Frances said she could.

"Ah, thank God," he said. "My present girl can't subtract and neither can I."

They discussed the salary, which was small because of the short hours: they went on to Frances' experience and what she would have to do. It was she who had to keep bringing him back to the point with questions, as he seemed more interested in talking about America when he knew she had been there.

Only about ten minutes later, Frances found herself walking down Bond Street towards Piccadilly with everything arranged. She was to start in nine days' time, which left her exactly a week in which to find a flat and the weekend to rush home and break the news to the

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family. It seemed quite crazy to have fixed everything so rapidly, but she suspected that Mr. Wildfire had just happened to like her and that the rest was mere formality.

"Well, now I'm a Londoner," she thought, and had a quick look at her reflection as she passed a shop window. A slender grey-coated figure looked back at her. Not bad, she thought. I almost look the part.

On impulse she boarded a bus in Piccadilly and got off at Harrods.

"This is a very special day," she thought, as she made her way to the dress department. There, she immediately fell in love with a cotton skirt in a vivid royal blue, patterned all over with red and gold and, on the strength of the new job, bought it there and then.

While she was waiting for her parcel, a girl came out of one of the cubicles.

"Jessica!"

"Why it's Frances! What an extraordinary thing!"

"You immediately make me think of the Sixth Form of St. Mary's—I'm not meaning to be rude!—but we've only met once, haven't we, since those days?"

"I'm terribly sorry I never answered your last letter, when was it, two or *three* Christmases ago. I meant to write straight away but I never did."

"What are you doing now? I've just this moment got myself a job in London."

"Let's have coffee. I've got so much to tell you I don't know where to begin."

Jessica was a dark, intelligent girl who had won almost all the prizes every year at school. She and Frances had been part of a quartet that for almost all their school years had been inseparable. The years between only seemed fuel for conversation as they slipped back in a moment into their old friendship.

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“And I’ve now got this chance to work in Rome for three months. My fare is paid both ways and part of the time I shall be able to share a flat with a girl who works in the Embassy, whom I shan’t meet till I get there.”

“Do you speak Italian then?”

“Yes, a bit. The sad part is that it’s only for three months. If it had been for longer, I’d have let my flat here, but it’s not worth the effort—I’m off on Wednesday.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Frances. “I start my new job on Monday week and what I’m desperately looking for is a flat!”

They stared at each other in amused amazement, as the girl put two more cups of coffee down in front of them.

“But my dear Frances, it’s sordid in the extreme—you’ve never seen such a hole. It costs three pounds ten a week and that’s double what it ought to be. There’s a sort of cupboard to cook in, with two electric rings, and the geyser for the hot water is one of the old terrifying ones. You wouldn’t look twice at it.”

“I think I might at that,” said Frances. “I can’t afford anything but the smallest possible rent in this present job, and I certainly can’t afford to go round to all the agents depositing two guineas, or whatever it is, to get them to look for me.”

“Well, come and see it before you get too enthusiastic.”

They paid their bill and waited outside for a bus.

The flat was in a mews behind a grim row of Victorian houses. It had a sort of hall-dining-room-sitting-room downstairs, into which the front door opened directly, with the minute kitchen leading off it. The stairs led up from the hall with a bedroom and bathroom above.

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"I tell everyone that I live just *beyond* South Kensington and then it sounds quite respectable!" said Jessica.

Frances thought it was not at all bad. It wanted doing up very badly; most of the paint on the blue door was peeling and inside it looked as though the walls were the original whitewash from the days when it had been a stable. Someone had gallantly tried to cheer the place up by painting the staircase a bright shade of yellow, but it didn't really achieve very much.

Jessica explained that it belonged to an old man who owned the whole mews, who had been a chauffeur. "He won't spend any money at all on doing any of the places up and I expect they'll soon fall to pieces and that will serve him right. An extraordinary little man with a glass eye will come for the rent at half-past eight each Wednesday morning. Keep the receipts for me in this clothes peg and forward my letters, like a saint. If the geyser goes wrong, ring this number, and don't put the two electric fires on upstairs and down at the same time or you'll fuse the lot."

Frances laughed. She didn't mind the snags. She had found herself a job and a flat in one day.

Chapter 4

The Gates of the Film World

FRANCES had been at her new job for three weeks before her plans for trying to do something a little more ambitious began to crystallize. She enjoyed working at the Galleries; it was cheerful and amusing but there was really very little to do and her salary went nowhere. After the first hour in the morning, most of the letters for the day were done and she had very quickly mastered the simple book-keeping. The only thing which still tied her in knots was the secret code system for pricing the pictures.

Mr. Wildfire had proved to be a natural comic. He liked to keep his staff, and the large number of friends and relations who came regularly to see him, in fits of laughter. The only thing he was ever solemn about was a sale, and as soon as anyone showed signs of wishing to pay good money for a picture, he concluded the deal as severely and as rapidly as possible.

The most interesting part to Frances was the way it all worked—the behind-the-scenes deals, when strange artists from Austria, or agents from Germany or Holland brought in their work. Mr. Wildfire was more catholic in his tastes than his window display and main gallery had first led Frances to believe. In a smaller gallery at the back of the building was an exhibition of strange symbols, twisted footprints in a gooseberry jam colour and an old lady and gentleman having breakfast upside down. Frances could literally not make head or tail of them and, one morning, was indiscreet enough to say so to one of the artists whose

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works had often been exhibited in a one-man show in the back gallery.

"Ah-ha," he said, "you must be the original Miss Blimp." And he called her this without mercy whenever he came into the gallery, as he did about once a week to get advice and a free meal from the generous Mr. Wildfire.

Frances was reminded of Violetta's party and the film world one afternoon. It was just after the welcome moment when the man with no teeth, who packed the pictures downstairs, brought round cups of powerful cockney tea the colour of ripe chestnuts. Two men came into the Gallery and asked to see Mr. Wildfire, who happened to be out attending a sale of pictures in an old country house. Mr. Clarkson, who usually took over when Mr. Wildfire was out, was helping a tall elegant woman in a beautiful mink coat to choose a flower picture. Frances asked if she could help instead.

The younger of the two men, who looked rather attractive, said they wanted a typical Edwardian picture to hang on the wall of a drawing-room for a scene in a film.

"Nymphs and dryads, I think, don't you, Charles?" he said to the older man.

"I've set my heart on an Alma-Tadema," he replied sadly, as if he thought the young man would be sure to get his own way in the end.

Frances took them round, trying to say as little as possible so as not to seem too fearfully ignorant of what they wanted.

"My saints!" said the younger one suddenly. "Look at this! Beauty bathing at sundown—it's just exactly what we want. Look at this white flesh—she looks as though she's made of vanilla icecream."

"Who painted this?" he asked Frances. Luckily she

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had been busily learning the names of the artists in the catalogue all that week and was able to tell him.

"Do you know when he lived?" he asked her. "We might as well be as authentic as possible," he said, turning to the other man.

"I don't know for certain," said Frances. "I'd prefer to check. Do you mind waiting a moment?"

The truth was she had no more idea than the man in the moon. She had not known very much about art and would only just have been able to tell a Holbein from a Reynolds, but she managed to appear knowledgeable and efficient. She sought out Mr. Clarkson.

"I think I'd better come and take over," he said, rather to her disappointment. He left her to make arrangements to send four flower paintings to a flat in Brook Street so that Mink Coat could choose the one she liked best in its future setting.

The film people finally selected two pictures which were to be hired later at a fee by the film company and returned when the shooting of the particular scene was complete. Frances was back at her desk when they left. The older man raised his hat to her and the younger one grinned and thanked her. They called a taxi with a shout outside and drove away. Frances felt unaccountably sad; they had seemed to bring with them a huge breath of an outer world of life and adventure, lived at a much faster rate, a world of creating something themselves rather than having to live on what had already been created by someone else. Frances gazed out over the top of the curtain at the crowds rushing by in Bond Street. They suddenly seemed more fortunate than she. Elegant ladies shopping, housewives, models, business men, vans, cars, taxis raced by intent on something of great moment, or so it seemed to Frances. It was probably an illusion of the

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quiet inside the Gallery and the striving urge of cars and ceaseless staccato of footsteps beyond the window, but the Gallery suddenly began to feel like a backwater. There was no sound inside now, the lights blazed everywhere but there was no one to be seen in the long gallery. Mr. Clarkson was probably downstairs in the basement having a second cup of tea.

As Frances gazed at the animated scene rushing by, she saw a woman pass who reminded her for a moment of the girl at the party whom Violetta had called Rosemary who had been so certain that jobs in the film world were not for anyone as dull or uninfluential as Frances. Films—continuity: in a moment, the challenge had hardened and fixed all her nebulous and hitherto unchannelled ambitions. That was it! That was something she would get her teeth into and give everything she had got. Her intense determination almost frightened her. How do I begin? How shall I set about it, she thought, and, at the same time, "I am more certain about this than anything in my life before." She picked up the telephone, mentally giving the petty cash threepence for the private call.

"Hello? Violetta? I'm terribly sorry to ring you at work but I need your help. Can you come and have dinner with me tonight? Yes, absolutely essential. I've taken a momentous decision. No, I'll tell you then. I can't talk now. Don't get on the wrong bus this time! 'Bye."

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Violetta proved an enormous help. She gave Frances the names and addresses of the major film studios and advised her to write to them on the chance that there might be an opening on the production side which might possibly lead to doing continuity work. At the

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same time she warned her about the union, as it was difficult to get anywhere without being a member. Frances wrote to the Association of Ciné Technicians asking for information as to how she might set about joining the union. Violetta had said that they were not taking on any more members unless someone happened to be put into a job for some reason and was subsequently made a member. Frances, in spite of Violetta's warning, was depressed when she received only a printed reply from the union stating that there were no vacancies. Did this mean that there would *never* be a vacancy again? Was there a waiting list of union-approved people, anxious to be continuity girls? If so, how did they get on the list in the first place? Was it impossible that *she* would ever get on the list? And so on. The old impossible question raised its head once more—if you could not get into the union unless you had had some experience, well, that was fair enough; but if you could never get even a sniff at a job, however small, to gain that experience without first becoming a member of the union, what then? *Impasse!* It was all very well for the union to protect its present members with all its power, but what about its responsibilities to the new blood? What about its responsibility to the trade to which it owed its existence? Were they to ensure that the old hand was always used at the expense of the new?

Frances began to wonder if perhaps the reason for the shut door was economics; if the truth was that the industry was not making enough money to develop as it should. She remembered hearing someone say that, after the war, the trade had been swamped by all the ex-Service men and women seeking to take up their careers where they left off, but in the comparative slump which followed there was no opportunity for a

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large proportion of these people, who were forced to seek temporary employment elsewhere. Yet they were all members of the union and as such rightly entitled to a job as soon as one came up. Now, so many years after the war, it would seem that the industry would have absorbed nearly all of these, but owing to various difficulties—entertainments tax, American competition, lack of sufficient capital—the film industry had failed to develop as had been anticipated in the glowing days of the successful war-time films.

Violetta gave Frances a list of several books which described the film industry and how a film was made so that she could get some idea of what it was all about. She gave her the address of Elizabeth Finch, the continuity girl whom Frances had met at the party, and the name of a director who was a friend of hers. Frances felt happy and assured. It seemed to her that she was tremendously lucky to have such good friends and influential contacts. It did indeed seem like cocking a snook at the Rosemary woman!

The more she read about the film world and how a film was made both here and in Hollywood, the more her interest deepened. It seemed a crazy world from the outside, but she was sure that if you managed to stay in you had to be good, and that this went for the technical side to an even greater degree than it did for those facing the camera. Frances determined to speed up her shorthand and typing and took a short refresher course at the secretarial college where she had trained.

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Weeks went by. The director friend of Violetta's wrote to her from Buenos Aires, or at least his secretary did, saying he didn't know of any openings at the moment but would remember her, and was she a

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member of the union? Three of the four film companies she wrote to sent a polite negative. Elizabeth Finch did not reply at all.

One evening Frances sat by herself in the flat and reviewed the situation. It was a depressing wet evening and she had turned on the electric fire for warmth as well as for companionship. Something about the flat was beginning to oppress her. Hidden away in this mews there was no sound to be heard after about ten o'clock except the distant hoot of a taxi's horn. No one else seemed to stir at this time of night and all the houses and flats surrounding this one might have been empty. Again Frances had the feeling that life was going on somewhere else and because she was stuck here she could have no part in it. She felt hungry, for she had not eaten since mid-day, but had not had the energy to do more than boil herself two eggs and make a cup of tea. After leaving the office, she had taken herself to see a film—the first time she had ever done so alone—and the sad business of coming out and having to find her way home alone without being able to discuss the film had depressed her. Adding insult to injury, she had run out of salt. She remembered Hank saying that an egg without salt was like a kiss without love. Thinking of his funny little sayings, of which he had an endless supply, was like conjuring his actual presence. It seemed impossible that she would never see him again. She had been as sure he really was in love with her, as she had loved him. She hurriedly forced herself to think of something else to prevent herself crying great miserable tears of self-pity.

She turned on the radio and poured herself another cup of tea. It was a variety programme and the audience were roaring with hideously false-sounding laughter. On another programme a man was intoning on and

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on about employment problems in Nicaragua. She snapped it off. The silence closed in around her again.

In three weeks' time, Jessica would be back from Italy, so the flat problem was pressing. She had looked at as many as twenty in the last fortnight and all, without exception, were too expensive for her present salary or else far too sordid. Her job at the Gallery was pleasant but uneventful. Should she hang on there in the hope that one day an opportunity would come along in the film world, or try for something else? She had by now given up all hope of being a continuity girl. For almost two months she had written letters, gone to see people, telephoned, searched advertisements and read trade papers through from cover to cover. She had written again to the union asking if they would be kind enough to give her a little more information, and what were her chances of ever getting on their list? About a fortnight later she received the information that she would have to get some kind of job in an A.C.T.T. grade (Association of Cinematograph and Television Technicians), providing there was no one in that grade out of work, and then submit an application for membership in the union. Ever since she had been trying to get any job, however small, which carried this "grading" in the hope that she might be able to transfer to something on the production side later on, but all her efforts in this direction had also proved to be fruitless. There did not seem one tiny crack anywhere into which she might creep. The gates of the film world were fast shut against her.

"Don't give up, Frances," she thought. "Something will turn up, and there must be a flat *somewhere* which isn't like a tenement, with a reasonable rent." Frances was rather like Lewis Carroll's Alice: when she got below a certain level of depression she automatically

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began to try and cheer herself up with stringent advice.

“Come on, Frances, don’t sink into gloom. The more you practise feeling miserable the better you get at it, and the better you get at it, the more you have to indulge your talent.”

“I think I’ll have to go back to Brighton and Dr. Long,” said her depressed half, getting in a broadside.

“Well, if you do that, it’s accepting defeat. Brace up! Do you remember that girl you met who had been trying for two years to get a job in a film studio. *Two years!* And here you are thinking of throwing in the sponge after only two months. Really!”

“But I couldn’t wait two years. Life’s too short.”

“It depends how much you want to do it. If you have really decided in your heart of hearts that this is the only thing you want to do nothing will deflect you, neither time, nor bad luck, nor money. You will just go on and on and on until you make it.”

“I wish I could believe you.”

While this private dialogue was going on, Frances washed up and prepared her breakfast tray for the morning. She switched off the light downstairs and went up to run a bath. The geyser was in a good mood. Soon, lapped in heat and breathing in the steam, heavily scented with her favourite bath essence, she saw things in a slightly more favourable light.

“Damn it, I will renew the attack tomorrow,” she thought, and went to bed.

Chapter 5

Opportunity Knocks

Two days later, Violetta rang her at the Gallery.

"Fran, honey, can you meet me for lunch? I've got to come up anyway to go to our London office and I've got something vital to tell you. Do you know the coffee bar in Hanover Street? Yes, 'Zareebar'. Half-past one. Bag two seats if I'm not there. See you then."

Over prawn salad and a transparent plastic cup of coffee that was chiefly milk pumped into spume and froth by the Italian coffee machine, they exchanged general enquiries. Then Violetta got down to business.

"Do you remember Elizabeth Finch whom you met at my party? Yes, I know you wrote to her. She rang me this morning. She's been on location in Rio and didn't get your letter until last week. She asked me to tell you she's so sorry not to have answered it but that on Thursday morning there's an interview being held which may interest you."

Violetta looked round as though she were afraid of being overheard, but the two people next to her were deep in conversation. She lowered her voice.

"It's to find a girl for a film which is shortly to be made at Elstree, by R.O.C., the Anglo-American film company who lease a studio here. Apparently they want a continuity girl to be an assistant to the one they've got. She'll really be a supernumerary, I gather, for most of the film, so it's a perfect opportunity to train someone. At the end of the film, the continuity

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girl they've got has to join another picture, for which she was signed up before this one. It will only be an overlap of a few days. Obviously they don't want to keep two qualified people hanging about, but the director can't have someone brought in just for the last shots, and he won't have anyone but this other girl for continuity, as she has worked for him before. Elizabeth said I wasn't to breathe a word to anyone but that you were to go along to the Brisson Hall in Wigmore Street, where the studio have taken a room, at eleven on Thursday. They will be interviewing about twenty-five to thirty people, she believes, from the union, and there's only the slenderest chance because they obviously want someone who is already a member. She said you weren't to have much hope, but just to go along on the off-chance. If none of the girls sent along by the union happen to suit, the job may be thrown open, and if you're on the spot and make the grade—you're in.

"She said I was to warn you, particularly, of what you are up against. There is a slight chance that with this job, which is unusual owing to the circumstances, the girls who come for the interview want the full salary because they have done continuity work before, and therefore the company will be more inclined to take someone who is trainable, as they can economise on the salary. But of course the trained girls will be given the opportunity to take a lower salary and, as members of the union, will be preferred to you every time. Do you understand?"

Frances did. She felt she ought to be in a whirl of excitement at the chance but she felt cool and detached.

"It sounds as if the odds are about the same as buying the lucky number in the Premium Bonds, but I'm tremendously grateful to you and Elizabeth. I must

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write and thank her for letting me know. Let's have a rich cake each, and to hell with our waistlines!"

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Frances wished she felt as calm now as she had then, but her throat felt stretched and her stomach empty. She had hurried along so fast from the Gallery that she was about ten minutes too early. Mr. Wildfire was away for the day playing golf, and Mr. Clarkson had given her permission to be away until after lunch, so she had no worries on that score, but if she went in like this she felt she might faint, or turn crimson and undoubtedly make a hash of things.

She passed a café with a gay striped awning outside. She decided to pull herself together and went inside for a cup of coffee. Around her sat a few lucky people who didn't have to work, chatting with their friends over mid-morning coffee in the middle of shopping expeditions.

Frances had fallen automatically into envying them before she began to wonder if they were really so enviable. I bet none of them has ever even had the chance of an interview like this, she thought. Even though it was most unlikely she would get the job, it would be interesting to have had the chance and seen for herself some of the people in the business. What would the other girls be like, she wondered? Were they feeling as nervous as she had felt a few moments ago?

Her throat relaxed and the warm coffee reduced the flutterings of the butterflies. Really, this is going to be most interesting. I shall tell my grandchildren that the nearest I ever got to being in films was Wigmore Street on a windy July morning. She almost laughed. This put the whole thing into the right perspective.

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She paid for the coffee and stepped out confidently into the street.

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The foyer of the Brisson Hall had a dark, dusty look, as if it objected to being used in the daytime at all and only really came alive after sundown, when the lights sprang up and it began to fill with people in evening dress, eager to hear a young pianist or a new soprano.

A bald man in his shirt-sleeves directed Frances to a room upstairs which was already half full of girls, sitting or standing. Most of them seemed to know each other and called greetings and remarks across the room with great self-assurance. Frances found an upright wooden chair near the window and sat down. She stared quite openly at the others, as they had stared at her, their glances an odd mixture of rivalry and suspended respect. They were an interesting selection of types. Some, the ones Frances felt herself to fear most, were smartly dressed, poised and looked efficient. Others looked to her as though they had never seen a typewriter in their lives, and one had blonde swinging hair and blue-black eyelashes which were so long they almost swept the cobwebs off the ceiling when she blinked. The theatrical ones looked as though they spent a considerable amount on their clothes with varying degrees of success. There were two timid girls sitting at the next window, near Frances, wearing identical dun-coloured mackintoshes. She would have liked to speak to them but did not like to move and lose her seat. More and more people began to come in until there was very little space left in the small room for anyone else.

After about ten more minutes there was a stir, and a general wave of excitement swept over everyone,

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though Frances from the window could not gather what had caused it. Compacts were opened and lipsticks waved like flags. Frances noticed one girl, in a low-necked black sweater, adjust the neckline on the shoulder to give a slightly more seductive effect. Frances wondered for a moment if she had come for the right interview and whether this was not perhaps an audition for the chorus of a new musical.

Minutes passed, then half-an-hour. People seemed to come and go and the chatter was more subdued. Frances thought perhaps that there were less people in the room, but could not be certain. She had a horrid fear that at any moment the bald man would look in and announce that they could all go home as the interviewing was over.

Soon it was five to twelve, then five past. By half-past the ranks really seemed to be thinning out. She wondered if she ought not to move a little nearer to the door. She panicked suddenly—suppose she missed her chance because she had not been pushing enough? She almost got up to stand by the door, but something held her back. After all, she was only here by accident and was almost an enemy in the camp. If anyone knew she was not a member of the union they might all unite to throw her out.

At five minutes to one the dreaded announcement came. A man with a beard appeared and shouted out, "O.K., girls, that's all for now. Those who haven't been in yet, come back at two o'clock sharp."

They filed out. Frances felt depressed. The only good thing was that they had not been sent home altogether. She wondered if the director, or whoever it was, saw everyone first before making up his mind. It seemed a very fair way to go about it, but it certainly took an awful long time.

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She was downstairs in the hall before she missed her gloves.

All the other girls had gone and she found her way back along the empty passage. As she reached the room, four people emerged from a door opposite. One was the man with the beard.

"What do you want?" he asked her.

"I've left my gloves here somewhere," said Frances.

"Trying to jump your turn, eh? Well, I suppose gloves have been used for that before."

Frances looked at him sharply. She turned away to go into the room.

"Are you up for this job?" asked one of the other three, a younger man with a slight Scottish accent.

"Come on, David, I want my lunch," said the larger man in the middle, who looked prosperous and authoritative. Then, staring at Frances, he said loudly, "You're exactly like Augustus John's 'Gitana'."

"What's your typing speed," asked the young man.

"Seventy—shorthand one-twenty," said Frances gravely.

"What's your present job?"

She explained her work at the Gallery.

"Prefer to have your pictures moving, uh?" he said, grinning.

"What else have you done with your life?" asked the large man automatically, as if he had been asking much the same question all the morning.

Frances told him, as briefly as possible, keeping her eyes on his face. She was nervously aware of four pairs of eyes staring at her and listening as if it didn't matter.

"Hmm," said the large man. "Well, I'm hungry, let's go. Thank you," he said coldly to Frances and started to walk down the passage. "Come on, for

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heaven's sake, David. We haven't time as it is for more than an indigestible mouthful."

"Come back this afternoon," said the Beard to her, in a slightly politer tone than he had used before.

Frances realised she had been lucky, but her main feeling was one of intense dislike of the man with the beard. As she searched for her gloves and found them under the chair where she had dropped them, her cheeks burned at the thought that he had reckoned she had left them behind on purpose.

But a second later she was laughing at herself. "You are a sheltered fool, Frances," she thought. "You must not be so stupidly sensitive. The film world is probably full of Beard and his type and the sooner you learn to stand up to them, the better."

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After lunch she rushed back to the Gallery to explain the situation to Mr. Clarkson. He did not object if she was away until tea-time, but he wanted her then to be in the Gallery while he went out. Frances promised to be back by four o'clock and prayed that the interviewing would be finished in time.

By twenty minutes to four she began to panic. Should she hang on in the hope that they would get through in time, or risk being late and upsetting Mr. Clarkson's arrangements, which had something to do with the sale of a picture. She calculated that it would take at least seven minutes to get back to the Gallery, even if she ran all the way and the Oxford Street traffic lights were in her favour.

She decided that she could not let Mr. Clarkson down and neither could she miss this opportunity, so when the man with the beard looked in next time she got up to speak to him.

CONTINUITY GIRL

"I wonder if you would mind if I went in next," she said. "I am working at the moment and promised to be back by four o'clock."

"Come on then," he said to her and showed her into a smaller room. Two of the other men she had seen before were sitting side by side at a table; the large fat man was sitting in an armchair with his feet stretched out in front of him.

"Ah, the gypsy girl," he said. "Tell me all about yourself again." He introduced himself as the Production Manager and the younger man they had called David as the Personal Assistant to the Director.

Frances spoke up. She was not nearly so nervous this time, her mood of complete confidence remained miraculously with her. Unlike any interview she had ever attended before, she began to note details of the room and think at the back of her mind about the personalities of the men. The large man had heavily lidded eyes, which appeared to be shut while she was speaking to him; he opened them only when he asked a question.

"Put down—no previous film experience, good speeds, good personality," he said to the first man sitting at the table who had several sheets of paper in front of him.

"I haven't got your name here," said the man, searching through a list with his forefinger.

"I don't belong to the union yet," said Frances firmly.

"How did you hear of this interview then?"

"Through Elizabeth Finch, who works at Shepperton."

"Yes, yes, yes, we know Elizabeth Finch. How do *you* know her?"

"She is a friend of a friend of mine."

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

"Right. Well, we'll let you know one way or the other," said the large man, reaching in his top inside pocket for a cigar.

"Bore about the union," he said to the others as she turned to go. "The most trainable, so far. By the way," he called more loudly. Frances turned.

"You know, for this job you have to be as strong as an ox, quicker than lightning on the uptake, as tactful as an Ambassador's wife—any others, David?"

"Yes, you need the patience of a medieval saint," he replied cheerfully, and smiled at Frances. "It's a dog's life. Do you really think you can do it?"

"I'd very much like to try," said Frances.

"Well, you never know, you may get the opportunity." And with that, the man in the armchair lit his cigar and Frances gathered that the interview was at an end.

"Don't forget your gloves this time," called out the younger man, whom they had called David. Frances grinned at him over her shoulder as she went out.

Chapter 6

Through the Gates

ON Saturday morning a long envelope dropped through the letter-box. It was marked with the name of the studio. Frances went back to her breakfast tray and propped it up in front of her. "Dear Miss Milne," she was certain it said, "We are sorry to disappoint you but owing to inexperience . . ."

She finished her coffee and lit a cigarette before slitting the letter open with her finger.

"Dear Miss Hungerford Milne," it said. "We are very pleased to be able to offer you the position of Assistant Continuity on the film 'Countess Alicia' on the understanding that the job is on a temporary basis for the duration of the film only, and the contract immediately terminable should your work prove unsatisfactory at any time.

"Your salary for the period of the film will be £10 a week. You will have to become a temporary member of the Association of Ciné Technicians. You should report to the Production Department, at the Studio, at 8.30 on August 18th. Please acknowledge. Yours, etc." and it was signed Kathleen Winterton, for Production.

"Ten pounds. Eight-thirty in the morning—two weeks to go." The important facts were buzzing through Frances' head like a telegram. "Find flat. See family. Tell Mr. Wildfire," continued her thoughts. She jumped up and started to clear away, she could not remain still a moment longer. Suddenly it burst in upon her that she *had* got the job. It was hers! It

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was incredible but actually true. *There* was the letter on the table to prove it. She would phone Violetta—no, she had gone to Sussex for the weekend. She *must* see her family. That was it! She would catch the ten-thirty train to Brighton and spend the weekend at home. Finding the flat would have to wait until Monday.

“Countess Alicia!” What was the film about? Who were the stars? It seemed unbearable suddenly to have to wait for two long weeks.

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Frances went in search of her mother whom she knew would be having coffee with one of her cronies at her favourite café. The place was jam-packed and there was a queue of people waiting for tables. Frances pushed past them, but they were so used to standing quietly waiting their turn that everyone seemed to accept that she had a good reason for doing so. Sure enough, her mother was hard at it at a table by the window with a plump friend of hers called Sweenie.

“Frances, darling!” she said, looking up. “How marvellous! Find an extra chair.”

They listened to her news and exclaimed at her luck in getting the job and then compared it unfavourably with her old one. They waved at a waitress to order some coffee for her but, after a time, they somehow, imperceptibly, slipped back to the subject which really interested them more, which they had been discussing when Frances arrived. She tried to pick up the threads but it was all about someone she knew vaguely called Paul, who wanted to marry a woman with two children. Frances felt bored.

“I think I’ll go along to Paynes,” she said, after

CONTINUITY GIRL

finishing her coffee. "I must buy some flat-heeled shoes—I can't wear high heels in the studio as I have to stand for hours."

"All right, dear," said her mother. "We're having lunch at one sharp because John's playing cricket at Hove this afternoon."

Frances left, knowing perfectly well that they would discuss her and her new job as soon as she was out of earshot. She wondered why her mother and Sweenie always preferred to talk *about* people rather than *to* them. She supposed it was an occupational disease of middle-age.

On her way to the shoe shop she ran straight into Simon.

"Hello, Frances," he said shyly. After having been great friends for years he had proposed and Frances had said "No".

His slightly hang-dog look annoyed her. She could not imagine that he might still be fond of her.

"I hear you did very well in your intermediate exam," she said non-committally. "Congratulations."

"And I hear you were the toast of New York," he said with a mock bow and a smile.

There seemed nothing else to say. They said goodbye to each other and Frances went into the shop to buy her shoes.

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On Monday morning she found a letter from Jessica saying that she would be delighted if Frances would stay on if she wanted to. That solved the flat question for the time being, although she suddenly realised with delight that she could now afford to pay a little more, with the prospect of her new salary. She got out some of the lists sent to her by the agents, which she

THROUGH THE GATES

had not bothered to read very carefully as the prices had been outside her original limits.

The prospect of breaking the news to Mr. Wildfire rather dismayed her. She had never "given notice" to anyone before and was afraid he might be angry, particularly as he had been very kind to her. It almost seemed like an insult to leave after three months and she wondered how she would explain. She supposed that Mr. Clarkson had an idea of what was going on after Thursday, when she had spent so long at the interview, but he had asked no questions.

Mr. Wildfire had not arrived when she got to the Gallery. He liked to open his mail himself, so there was nothing to do until he came. She tidied out a drawer and went downstairs into the basement to look at some pictures which had been bought at a sale at Sotheby's. One was a portrait of a little girl, dressed in muslin, with a red satin ribbon threaded through her brown curls.

Mr. Wildfire came in while she was looking at it.

"What do you think of it?" he asked her, putting his bowler hat and umbrella into a cupboard. "Look here," and he seized a duster, spat on it, and began to clean a corner of the picture. Encouraged he rubbed harder with some methylated spirit on a piece of cotton-wool. Gradually the paint vanished and there appeared to be another colour underneath. It looked like a foot under the paint of the spinning top which the little girl was playing with.

"This has been painted over another portrait," he said. "I knew I was right. This is a much older picture. Do you see what they've done? The little girl's face is quite different from the rest of the top layer of paint—her hair, dress and the background have been painted in at a later date."

CONTINUITY GIRL

"Why did they do that?" asked Frances.

"Got tired of the original; artist wanted a canvas; lots of reasons. Let's see." He started to rub away the hair very carefully. Instead of a tumble of brown curls, a line of sleek, smooth dark hair showed up and the child's face immediately looked older.

"I believe this is a Lockwood," he said. "Look him up for me in the Royal Academy lists of about 1820-22."

"Here it is," said Frances. "Shall I read out the list of his pictures which were exhibited?"

"No, let me see—I know where most of them are. 'Lady Maureen Temple'—that's in the Portrait Gallery; 'Arcadia', no, no; 'Miss Stokes'? I wonder if this could possibly be Miss Stokes? Upstairs, you'll find a book about Lockwood—would you get it? It'll give the list of everything he painted and a description of it."

In the excitement of the discovery—by the description it really did seem as though it might be the original Miss Stokes—Frances felt she could not break her news. Yet she knew she must, in all fairness, give him as much time as possible to find someone else.

He was as excited as a schoolboy over his find, particularly because his instinct about the picture, an instinct acquired over almost forty years of looking at pictures of all ages, had not been wrong. The thing which pleased him more, however, even transcending his pleasure in his own ability to spot a fake, was the fact that he had paid £35 for the picture at the sale and would undoubtedly be able to sell it for £1,500 to £2,000 to an American collector he knew who already owned a large number of Lockwoods. He was very nearly dancing with glee.

Just before Frances left that evening, he asked her to do a letter for him.

THROUGH THE GATES

"Oh, by the way, do you want to stay here?" he asked suddenly.

Frances looked up sharply. Had he read her thoughts, or had Mr. Clarkson said anything?

"If you do, it doesn't matter, but one of my nieces—the married one, is bored with doing nothing in her flat and wants to come here. You really ought to be earning more, I imagine, but for a married woman this job is ideal as she has from half-past four onwards to shop and prepare the dinner."

Frances laughed with relief, and explained that she had been wondering how to break the news to him.

"The only tiresome thing is," he said seriously, "that she can't add two and two together. Do you think you could possibly show her very carefully how to keep the books before you go? Otherwise," he said sadly, "we shall be in the soup."

Frances promised to explain as carefully as she could. Mr. Wildfire leapt up and put on his bowler.

"We shall be very sorry indeed to lose you," he said, "but you must come in and see us whenever you like. Do you know," he said, "apart from that, this has been the most extraordinary week. Finding Miss Stokes was one thing, but they've actually given me a lower handicap at the golf club. What do you think of that for a man of my age? It's very expensive! I shall have to stand everyone a drink at the club on the strength of it. Good evening."

And he left, without giving Frances time to reply. She watched his alert, hurrying figure disappearing up Bond Street. She felt that she had enjoyed her time here and would look back on it with amusement and pleasure, but now it was time to move on to something which would demand far more of her. With a shock she realised there would be no more strolling into the

CONTINUITY GIRL

office at ten o'clock. She would have to get up by half-past six at least to be at the studio by eight-thirty. In two weeks' time she would be starting work in earnest; her easy days were over.

Chapter 7

On the Set

THE Green Line bus dropped Frances near the Studio. It looked like a series of large buildings of all shapes with no overall plan. It was enclosed by high fencing, making it look quite inaccessible. The only way in was through a large gate for cars and a smaller one for people on foot. Just inside was a flat-roofed entrance building, through which everyone had to pass. One door was labelled "Visitors and Extras", the other "Staff". Frances hesitated a moment, uncertain if she would really be considered staff yet or not. Once inside, her credentials were scrutinised as though she had been a dangerous enemy. The doorman looked at her as if she were a "fan" trying to force her way in by treacheries to get an autograph, and he told her he had had no notice of anyone of her name joining the staff. Finally he consented to ring the Production Department. In the middle of the telephone conversation, which was behind a glass panel and which she could not overhear, Frances saw his expression change. When he came back to the desk he was quite friendly. "Will you go to office Number 29—Miss Burrows' office. Do you see the middle building with the clock tower? Go in at the main door there and along a corridor on the right. You'll find it." Frances thanked him and set off along the tarmac of the drive, which divided in four different directions. It seemed a vast rabbit warren of roads, gardens and buildings. Her immediate, rather tense thought was that she must not lose herself.

The office marked No. 29 was empty. But through a

CONTINUITY GIRL

connecting door Frances heard voices. The door was open and she approached cautiously. At that moment, a girl of about her age pushed past her, calling back over her shoulder, "I'll find him at once if I can, Miss Burrows," and dashed away.

Miss Burrows was a woman of about forty. She had an alert, not unattractive face. She was speaking into the telephone, but saw Frances and waved her to sit down in the chair opposite her desk.

"Tell him," she was saying, "that I know he was up all last night but that it must be ready. It's *got* to be. We can't hold it up another day." She put the phone down and it immediately rang again.

"Harry? What's all this about these expenses you've put in. You're crazy—you'll have to modify them. What? No, quite frankly I won't pass them. Look here, Harry . . ."

The conversation went on. Frances looked round the modest office, furnished in light wood. It was strictly for business and there were no feminine touches. She gathered that Miss Burrows must be fairly high up in the hierarchy of production. She looked a dynamic personality, businesslike and efficient. Frances wondered what her attitude to herself might be.

"Sorry, dear," she said as soon as the phone went down for the second time.

"God, what a morning. But then, what am I saying, it's like that every single day. It's a mad house. I wonder I'm sane. You ought to go along right away to the 'Countess' set. Have you seen the union people? No? Well, I'll get Janet to take you there, otherwise you'd never find it. Come back here afterwards and I'll take you down to the set myself.

"You know what you're in for, don't you? It's a lunatic life. Hope you're not looking for a husband? No

ON THE SET

continuity girls ever get married—they never have time. I was one once, now I'm on this job which is possibly even crazier. Glad you didn't come yesterday, we spent the whole of the night before shooting at London Airport. I hadn't a good word for anybody. Here's Janet. Well, good luck—buzz in here if you want to know anything—I'm everyone's aunt. Ask Lena."

Janet, Miss Burrows' secretary, turned out to be the girl who had rushed out of the door, and she told Frances that Lena Jones was the continuity girl with whom she would be working. Frances looked forward to meeting her, but rather dreaded it at the same time. So much would depend on whether they liked each other. Frances visualised her as a smaller edition of Miss Burrows and felt anxious. She could imagine that that type of person would not tolerate the smallest mistake. You had to go through life firing on all eight cylinders, if you had them, all the time—there was no room for off days when you might not feel quite up to things. Frances felt sure she was not as tough as the job required. To add to her usual first-day anxieties came the realisation that she might not be quick or brainy enough for the work either. But this was a decadent thought. She remembered that she had landed the job, purely by chance she was sure, but now it was up to her to prove that she could do it as well as anybody.

On the way out of the main building they met the Production Manager who had interviewed her.

"Ah," he said. "Good morning, Miss Milne. Glad to see you've joined us. Don't forget to work like hell."

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Janet was finally designated to take Frances to the set as Miss Burrows had had to rush away to deal with some new emergency.

CONTINUITY GIRL

They walked along one of the drives and suddenly turned a corner and were in what looked like a long narrow street with odd-shaped high buildings leading off it on either side. Outside several of the doors of each building people were standing, talking and holding cups of tea or eating buns. On one side, Frances saw a trolley, attended by a girl in a white overall, stacked with white canteen cups and a tea-urn. What was suddenly so extraordinary was that one or two of them wore period evening dress over which they had thrown modern coats or shawls. Frances particularly noticed their hair, curled high off the back of the neck and topped with an aigrette, a diamond star or a tiara. In the morning light they looked like some strange mirage of evening splendour. Frances felt that if she rubbed her eyes they might disappear. She felt a sudden wonderful quickening of excitement.

Janet led her through one of the doors and she found herself in a long corridor. On either side were huge heavy doors with lights above them.

“When the red light is on,” said Janet, “you can’t go in on pain of death.” Frances noticed that farther down the passage, over another door, a red light was on and people were waiting in a group outside. There was a large notice by the door which said in red letters:

ADVICE TO THE UNINITIATED

To look directly into the beam of arc and high-intensity lamps for any length of time may be injurious to your sight—for your own sake therefore avoid doing this.

The red light went off and Janet pushed open the door, which seemed to be about four inches thick; they went through a second door and were inside what seemed to be at first sight an enormous barn. Where

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they stood the light was dim but in the centre could be seen a blaze of lights. Frances could see that chains hung from all parts of the ceiling, supporting platforms or pieces of scenery. The intense brightness was coming from four narrow platforms in the form of a square slung from the ceiling and about eighteen feet from the ground. On these platforms were the huge arc lights which shone down on the scene, hidden from view by scenery. Over the floor lay lengths of cables, large and small, which Frances fell over at once, so intrigued was she by the sights and sounds all around her.

As they approached she drew in her breath. In front of her, a blaze of light, was a most beautiful ballroom. Decorated in the palest green, it was hung with magnificent chandeliers. At either end were two tall pillars painted in green and gold. On the walls were pictures in wide gold frames and pieces of elegant antique furniture were placed here and there on the shining parquet floor.

Frances could not take it all in at once; her eyes darted here and there and back again, unable to see enough of this fairy ballroom. But it was the people who fascinated her the most; they were seated on sofas, or placed in groups in different parts of the room, the women in magnificent evening gowns, the men in court dress with knee-breeches and garters, or in dress uniform. The colour and splendour were unbelievable.

Suddenly she realised that one half of the room did not exist—that she was seeing three sides of the ballroom, like looking into a doll's house. On the open side, quite near where she stood, was a huge black contraption, with four or five men in open-necked shirts hanging on to it precariously. Frances looked more closely as her eyes became accustomed to the dimness

CONTINUITY GIRL

in which she stood in comparison with the brilliantly lit scene, and realised that the big box on the end of the contraption on wheels must be the camera. Then she noticed another man who was standing on what looked like a table on wheels. He was holding a long boom from which hung, unmistakably, a microphone. Bits of information from some of the books she had read on making films began to come back to her. This would be one of the sound team. She looked round for the chief sound engineer, who was responsible for "mixing" the sound, making one microphone louder or softer, fading out and so on, and sure enough, not far behind the wagon affair with the boom she saw a man sitting in what looked rather like a baby's pram with a panel in front of him with dials and knobs.

But there was no more time for gazing around. Janet took her up to a desk which was standing in the middle of wires and cables, its back to a bit of scenery, and she saw a tall girl seated at a typewriter, her red hair cut very short. When she looked up she had very attractive blue eyes and a most charming smile. Frances felt herself inwardly relax. She knew in that moment that she would like this girl and be able to work well with her.

"Hello," she said. "You must be Frances. I can't introduce you to the Director for the moment because he's rather involved, but come and meet everyone else. Is this your first time ever in a studio?"

Frances confessed that it was.

"Well, don't worry if it seems like a mad-house at first. It took me weeks to know what it was all about. This is Peter Winthrop, the Lighting Camera Man; this is Frances Milne, who is Assistant Continuity."

They chatted for a few moments and then Lena took her on. After trying to concentrate hard on the names

ON THE SET

and the faces, Frances lost hold. She felt she forgot the last name immediately she heard the next one, but had an impression of many kindly humorous faces who welcomed her as one of them without an exception. Most of them made friendly little teasing remarks about the craziness of the film world. One asked her point-blank if she were sane. When she laughed and said "Yes", she thought she was, they told her that in that case she was the only one there who was.

Finally Lena took her up to a small man with very square, powerful-looking shoulders. She gathered it was the Director. She shook hands before realising that she had seen his photograph in a film magazine some time ago. He looked at her rather coldly and said, "Keep your wits about you," and turned back to a large desk on which was a printed notice with his name—"Mr. Paardin".

"Come and sit at my desk," said Lena. "Here's a chair for you. Incidentally," she said, lowering her voice, "I wouldn't leave your bag about if it's got any money in it. It's only that, in these big scenes, there are so many people about and you never know. Things can disappear here. I should leave it in my desk if I were you. Look, I don't think I can really explain very much to you today. Why not watch everything and relax and tomorrow I'll start explaining in earnest. That suit you?"

"Ideally," said Frances. "My head's in a whirl. But can I help you in any way—typing, I mean, or anything?"

"Well, no, I don't think you can just yet. But ask me anything you like and I'll try and explain what I can. Anything you want to know from the boys—the camera and sound crews, for instance—just go up and ask them. They'll be simply delighted to help."

CONTINUITY GIRL

“One thing. I shall stand right up by the camera when we start shooting, but I’d keep well in the background if I were you. Mr. Paardin’s not in his best mood and he hates new faces until he gets used to them being around. This is a very important and complicated scene. If by chance he gets angry, just fade away. It’s the best thing to do.”

Just then a bell rang. Frances noticed that there were many more people crowding round the edges of the scene than there had been at first. Then she saw that the ballroom led into another, L-shaped room. The camera was now pointing directly at a huge tapestry, almost the height of the set wall, below which was arranged a long table laid with the most fantastic-looking food, grapes, peaches, silver dishes with cakes and sweets: glasses, bottles of wine and champagne, and in the centre a huge castle of icecream, decorated with swirls and coils in Neapolitan colours and set in a silver tray, the base or moat of the castle almost entirely filled with real rose-buds.

Lena was walking away from her towards the camera carrying a script in a thick cover and a stop-watch. Frances watched eagerly to see exactly what she did. She herself timidly took up a position miles behind everybody so as not to be noticed.

One of the men she had met for a moment, whom she believed to be the Assistant Director, was clapping his hands above his head.

“Everyone in their places, please.”

More people in evening dress began to stream on to the set and take up their places in front of the long table. The camera was so placed that it could swing slightly to the left and show the ballroom between the pillars. The actors who had been sitting relaxed in the chairs, sat upright and began to talk animatedly in

ON THE SET

mime to their neighbours. Frances saw one, an older man in court dress with a pointed beard and a decoration of some sort on his left breast, fold away a copy of the *Daily Express* with a sigh of resignation and put it in his pocket.

She watched fascinated. The Assistant Director was moving in front of the camera. He had rolled up his shirt-sleeves and loosened his tie. Frances could feel the heat of the lamps even from where she stood, and wondered how the actors could bear their heavy costumes. The women were better off than the men, as most of them wore low-necklined dresses, although she noticed one woman putting a handkerchief on her shoulder and glancing quickly at a light. She realised that in the direct beam she was probably stung by the heat. She glanced at her watch—it was now nearly eleven o'clock. They had, she supposed, already been here two and a half hours. She decided at once that the extras really earned their money. She wondered how some of the older ones, and there were many, managed to stand for such long hours.

She turned quickly as a voice spoke in her ear.

“Why don’t you stand a bit nearer?”

“Well, I was warned not to go too near.” She recognised the man who had spoken to her but could not remember who or what he was. He had a script in his hand.

“I’ll show you where to go,” he said, and took her forward. He put her just beside a jutting piece of scenery where she had a much nearer and better view. She hoped it was all right, and glanced rather timidly in the direction of the camera which was now almost directly on her left. Mr. Paardin was sitting up on a little seat on the camera trolley, staring through the camera lens at the scene. She prayed he would not see her.

CONTINUITY GIRL

"Now quiet, please," shouted the Assistant Director. "I want plenty of mime and conversation. When the Prince comes in I'll wave my hand and I want the noise to cut right out as you turn to see him come in."

Frances wondered if this shot had already been rehearsed or not; she supposed it must have been for everyone began to speak animatedly and gaily. There was much fluttering of fans, laughter and coquettish glances. All the costumes, Frances noted, were of the Edwardian period; the piled-up hair, the tightly corseted busts and slight forward stance which the bustles gave made the whole scene appear like a number of paintings by Sargent come alive. Would the "Prince", by any chance, be the future Edward VII?

"Mr. Justice, please," shouted a voice. Frances could not see what was happening.

Suddenly the Assistant Director shouted out: "O.K., Dick?"

"O.K., Mike."

"Right. Here we go. Red light."

A bell clanged. Frances turned and saw that the Director was now standing beside the camera and Lena was next to him, the script open on her left arm. The camera operator was in the little seat and he banged shut the back of the camera.

The Assistant Director shouted, "Turn over!"

A voice from somewhere said loudly, "One-twenty-two, take one."

"Action!"

It was the Director himself who had called "Action" in a strangely taut crisp voice. Frances felt the tension mount to reach its height on that one sharp command.

The talk and laughter went on, more animatedly than ever. Suddenly it ceased. A voice could be heard announcing, "His Royal Highness, the Prince of

ON THE SET

Wales." Immediately all the elegant and beautiful heads, curled and bejewelled, turned in the direction of the gold pillars and the ballroom beyond. Frances could just see a little group advancing in evening dress and orders. The ladies swept into a curtsey, the men bowed. She saw in the centre of the group a stout, tall man—Edward VII to the life. So powerful was the atmosphere that Frances almost felt herself obliged to curtsey. But as suddenly as it had sprung to life the make-believe was broken. The Director had shouted, in that same crisp almost angry voice:

"Cut!"

Chapter 8

“Action”

THE lunch break was called at one o'clock. “O.K., boys and girls, that's it. Be back here sharp at two o'clock,” shouted the Assistant Director, whom Frances had now got fixed in her mind by his name, Michael Stein.

She found her way back to Lena's desk.

“Come on, let's eat,” said Lena. “There's always a rush at the canteen restaurant, so we'll have to be quick.”

They crossed the “street” and found their way by back alleys and passages to the restaurant. It was not very large and the tables were filling up rapidly. They secured two places at a table for five. Frances looked around her in amazement. The room was full of a crazy mixture of costume and working clothes. She could pick out some of the people from her own set by their clothes, but there were many dressed in costumes which she did not recognise. To her startled surprise, she realised that the man at the next table was Sir John Gielgud. At that moment he pushed back his chair to stand up and knocked Frances' chair by mistake. He turned round with a charming half bow to her and apologised. He was dressed in a brown velvet coat over an embroidered waistcoat, with ruffles at his wrists and a beautiful cravat. Frances was so determined not to gape like a fan that she replied almost coldly and turned hastily back to Lena, although she furiously wished afterwards that she had smiled and been more gracious.

“ACTION”

There were several other faces she thought she recognised but was not certain who they were. Over the five-shilling canteen lunch, Lena began to explain things to her and she had no more time for glancing around.

The film had been “on the floor” already for three weeks, and before that had been under planning for three months, all of which time Lena had been working on it with the Director. It appeared that when a film was originally decided upon, the Director and a number of other people went to work on the script. The usual thing, Lena said, was to change it completely and she, the continuity girl, would take down all their alterations in shorthand and retype the finished script.

“I typed this one eight times before we reached the final version,” she said ruefully.

After that, the planning of every detail of the film began. Many things had to be taken into account—when the studio space would be available, when the stars, who had to be signed up, were free from other commitments. Then a minute plan was made of the sequence in which the shooting would take place, not by any means in chronological order. It might happen that one particular studio was not available for a big scene until a certain date, or that a star who had to make another picture would only be available for a certain number of weeks. Then the crowd scenes were better taken altogether, if possible, so that the extras would not be kept hanging about doing nothing. Every detail of each day’s shooting was therefore planned, with an eye to all the economies which could be made. Making a film was an expensive business.

Frances asked how much, roughly, a film cost to make, and Lena told her it was anything from £120,000 to half a million. On a big set like the ballroom scene

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which they were shooting at the moment, the lighting alone cost £100 a minute. Fortunately, she said, the studio made its own current, for in some of the really big scenes they used about the same amount of light which would be burnt by a whole town.

“Tell me who are the stars,” asked Frances eagerly, as they ate their fruit salad and cream.

“Well, you’ve seen James Robertson Justice, who is playing the Prince of Wales. Richard Todd is the male lead—he’s Lascelles Viscount Durham, the Earl of Whitby’s heir. He is the one who meets Alicia at the ball, the present scene, and falls in love with her. Joyce Grenfell is Mrs. Keppel, Michael Hordern is Lascelles’ father, and Avice Landone his mother.”

“Does Queen Victoria come into it?”

“No,” said Lena, “but her presence is felt. We hope to give the feeling, through various little pointers in the script, of the powerful widow at Windsor, holding the power but gradually losing the grip of personalities by shutting herself away and failing to notice the change of mood of the times.”

“Who plays Countess Alicia? You haven’t mentioned her. Isn’t she the most important of all?”

“Yes, she is. She’s completely new. She has not made a name yet. She was found by the Director acting in repertory and he’s gambling on her. It’s quite a risky thing, and up till a few weeks ago there were quite a few complaints, I can tell you. When there is so much money involved in a big Technicolor film like this, you can’t take many risks. It’s the well-tried names that are the box-office draw. Another thing is the American market. There are only a few top English actors who are guaranteed a proper house showing in the States—that is, main circuit release instead of being treated like a continental film and only shown in certain small

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cinemas in what are reckoned to be cosmopolitan towns. And as this picture is being made by an American director by this Anglo-American film company, their eyes are very much on the American box-office receipts and every director is trying to make a picture which will be a startling success and make a lot of money—otherwise the company will be after him. But Mr. Paardin is so well known, and has made so many successful films in Hollywood, that he can get away with something which many another director would not be allowed to do. I think,” said Lena, lowering her voice, although the people at their table were gossiping so furiously that they would not have heard if she had shouted, “I think he’s going to pull it off.”

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When they got back to the set after lunch, it was to find that the camera had already been set up opposite another corner of the ballroom. Lena hurried up to the cameraman to ask him how long they had been “setting up”, as Frances discovered she had to make careful notes as to the length of time each scene took to set up, how long each shot took, when they began and when they ended each day’s work. Frances now understood the reason for the stop-watch which was to time each scene to the second.

Certain of the extras were being placed by the Director where he wanted them. Frances noticed that a number of people were standing out of the range of the camera down the far end of the ballroom. She wondered if there had been a mistake.

The Assistant Director was standing quite near her watching the scene intently. When he saw her, he smiled.

“Making any sense of it?” he asked.

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"I'm in a dream," said Frances. "Why are all those people there, when the camera is pointing in the opposite direction?"

"Ah," he said, "good question. Because the mirror above the fireplace reflects the ballroom."

Frances would have liked to ask more but he had darted away. In her interest and excitement she had drawn nearer and nearer to the scene without realising it. Suddenly she stumbled over a thick cable and only just managed to save herself from falling by clutching what she realised was part of the camera "dolly"—the long contraption which supported the big Technicolor camera at the end of it, which was several feet off the ground.

"Mind how you go!" said an amused voice above her.

It was the cameraman—or camera operator as she remembered he was called. She thought Lena had said his name was Richard something. He had a friendly smile and she grinned rather ruefully back.

"Would you like to see what it looks like through the camera?" he asked.

Frances climbed up on the little seat she had seen the Director sitting in and hoped he would not see her. On the left side of the camera was the stereoscopic lens—a glass window about three inches wide by two inches deep. In the lens the colour was identically reproduced, she could see the pale green and gold of the walls, the corner of the marble mantelpiece, the silver bowl of roses on the table, the Louis Quinze chairs with tapestry backs and seats embroidered with elegant ladies and gentlemen in delicate pastel shades. Richard explained that the scene looked squashed up in the lens, concertina'd. It was filmed like this and then, when developed, was stretched out to fill the panoramic screen.

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Frances got down and thanked him. He seemed disposed to go on explaining things to her, but out of the corner of her eye she had seen Mr. Paardin approaching and she beat a hasty retreat into the background.

It seemed to take ages to get everything ready. Frances wished she understood what everyone was doing. The man Lena had first introduced her to, Peter Winthrop the Lighting Cameraman, was walking about in a beautifully tailored white shirt with a little black instrument in his hand. Every now and then he held it up to his eye-level at arm's length. Frances noticed that he wore a black glass monocle on a string. Later she noticed him put the monocle to his right eye and gaze up at one of the arc lights on the balcony.

"O.K., Cyril," he called out loudly. "Spread it!"

A big arclight, which looked rather like one of the searchlights Frances remembered seeing when she was a child in the war, was being hauled up to the balcony on chains. One of the men who worked on the balcony was talking to one of the extras.

"Like to swop places, mate," he said. "It's ninety-six in the shade up there!"

"Mind your hat-rack!"

Frances ducked just in time to avoid the microphone on the boom which was being moved past her into position.

"Stand-ins, please," called the Assistant Director. Two men in ordinary suits picked their way across the cables and into the scene. One was rather plump and Frances imagined that he must be the Prince of Wales' stand-in. They were joined in the next moment by a young girl. She was very slender and pretty, with a cloud of red hair. She wore a smart navy blue and white cotton dress which to Frances' eye looked expensive. She wondered if by chance this was the actress herself,

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then realised that it must be the stand-in as she had no period costume, yet she looked attractive enough to be a star in her own right.

She looked around for Lena and saw that she was busy typing away at her desk quite unconcernedly. Grouped around her on chairs were some of the extras who were not wanted for the moment. One sat on the end of her desk. Frances wondered how she could concentrate with all the noise and chatter around her.

“Miss Ellice, please,” called someone.

Frances looked round. For the first time she noticed that built against the wall of the studio were several dressing-rooms, each with a name on the door. Frances heard an extraordinary deep and musical voice call out: “Do you want me?”

“Yes, please, dear,” answered Mr. Paardin himself. “We want you for a line up.”

“Coming,” answered the voice cheerfully.

The door opened and out stepped a woman who was quite unquestionably beautiful. She was tall but appeared taller in her simply cut white satin evening dress. The bodice was cut in a wide sweep of a neckline from shoulder to shoulder, and all the fullness of the skirt was gathered to the back. She wore no jewellery on her neck or arms. Her hair, which was of a most unusual dark red, was piled on to the top of her head and she wore a single white aigrette pinned into her hair with a diamond brooch.

She stepped across the cables followed by a little retinue of people. There was her dresser, the hairdresser and the man who had showed Frances where to stand. She had since discovered that he was the Dialogue Director, who was like an extra assistant to the Director on a big film such as this one and who rehearsed their lines with the actors.

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Taking up her place in the corner of the ballroom opposite the camera, her beauty was suddenly in its right setting. Frances hardly noticed the other actors coming on to the scene, including the Prince of Wales, she was so caught by the star quality of this woman. That she had the magical thing called “presence” was unmistakable, it seemed to affect everyone; the atmosphere was much tenser and the eyes of everyone, from the Director to the carpenter standing near Frances with his hammer sticking out of his hip pocket, were upon her.

Frances noticed Lena go up to her and show her the script. She nodded and smiled.

“Right—rehearsal then,” called the Assistant Director. “Quiet everybody, please.”

Mr. Paardin was explaining something to her. In his dark suit he looked extraordinarily incongruous beside her, as if he had wandered into a fancy dress party in the wrong clothes.

A group of young officers in uniform stood round her; Frances gathered that they were to be talking like this when the Prince came in. A gentleman usher came over and said something to her and she turned just as the Prince of Wales and his group came up to her. Frances could see Joyce Grenfell standing just behind and a little to the left of the Prince.

Alicia curtseyed and the Prince came right up to her, smiling and looking pleased with himself.

“I am told you didn’t back Persimmon today? Never mind. Come and re-coup your losses with me at the bridge table.”

Frances watched the actress. Her face for a moment seemed to change, so quickly that only if you had been staring hard at it would you have thought she was non-plussed. Frances noticed Richard Todd in uniform,

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staring intently at her. He had come in with the royal suite. Then she smiled playfully and charmingly at the Prince.

"Sir, you must excuse me. I'm afraid I can't even tell a King from a knave."

There was a roar of laughter, led by the Prince himself, who, tapping her on the arm to admonish her, went on with his party through a door on the right of the fireplace and into a room, which could just be seen as a library with a blue carpet and several tables laid out for bridge.

They rehearsed it three times before the Assistant Director called out, "It's a take this time, everybody. Places, please."

The Prince and his party retraced their steps yet again into the far corner of the ballroom and out of range of the camera. A man with a thermos flask came up and took out a pad of cottonwool. With this he went round to one or two of the actors and mopped their foreheads. Frances noticed that he used the same piece of cottonwool for several perspiring foreheads and reflected that one was obviously not supposed to be fussy about little things like using somebody else's powder puff in show business!

The little woman with dyed blonde hair and a huge pair of scissors swinging from her waist went up to Alicia and smoothed an invisible crease out of her skirt.

A thin young man, whom Frances had not seen before, appeared from somewhere and removed one of the roses which had drooped in the heat and substituted another.

Lena stepped forward in front of the camera and asked one of the extras to take off a pair of dark glasses which they had put on during rehearsals to save their eyes from the glare.

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Michael Stein, the Assistant Director, was clapping his hands for silence.

“Quiet, please. Lots of mime in the background, no noise. Red light!”

The bell clanged.

“Here we go. Ready, Dick?”

“All set.”

“Now—sh-sh-sh. Turn over!”

“One-twenty-three, take one.”

“Action!”

Chapter 9

Apprenticeship

NEXT morning Lena told her she must read the script and suggested she went to the script department to get her own copy.

Frances found the department upstairs in one of the long office buildings, after taking one or two wrong turns. It was tempting to linger on the way and follow some of the signboards she saw to "Make-up Departments", "Casting", "Effects", "Wardrobe", "Dressing-rooms", "Stages 1, 2, 6". She wished she might be invisible and be able to visit all the departments unseen.

"You'll have to wait for Miss French," said the girl in the Script Office. "No one else is allowed to give them out."

Miss French when she came reminded Frances at once of the girl at Violetta's party.

"Sorry," she said abruptly, "we can't let you have one."

"But I think I'm supposed to have one," said Frances firmly.

"I can't help that," said Miss French, getting quite tight-lipped. "All the scripts have been given out and I haven't been told to issue any more."

Frances felt this was ridiculous. She could not help asking why the scripts were considered so precious.

Miss French looked at Frances as if she were going to spit poison at her.

"They are highly secret documents," she said. "We don't give them to *anybody*"—this with a look at

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Frances. "They are only given out to people who have authority to have them."

Frances felt she was wasting time and missing what was going on in the studio. She would like to have stayed and proved that she was as entitled to have a script as any other bona fide member of the crew of "Countess Alicia", but it seemed too petty for words and she left the office.

Lena laughed when she told her about it.

"Oh dear! They have nothing else to worry about but scripts and they let it get a bit on top of them. Of course you don't want to go around leaving copies of new scripts on the Underground, but once the film has begun shooting, the only people to fear, I suppose, would be a rival film company, but how they would issue another film in the time it takes to prepare, well . . . ! You'll have to have a script—I'll go and see her about it tomorrow. I'm afraid," she said more seriously, "that you do sometimes get that sort of refusal to look beyond their own small circles from people who are on the fringe of film making. It's here, in the heart of the business, that you are sure of being absolutely free of that kind of pettiness, thank heaven."

She went to the Director's desk and pulled out a copy of the script.

"The Director has two copies," she said, "so you can have this one for today and we'll put it back tomorrow; he won't want it. But don't let anyone see you take it out of the building," she grinned. "Wrap it up in an old newspaper, or something!"

"Now," she went on. "Let me give you some idea of what you'll have to do. The main job of a continuity girl is exactly that . . . continuity. You saw the scenes we shot yesterday? Well, today, we go on with a scene which takes place the same evening—therefore every

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detail must be exactly as it was yesterday, costumes, scene, props, hairstyles, jewellery, etc. It's continuity's job to see that they are the same. Now the wardrobe people will see that Alicia, for instance, is wearing the same evening dress, and she herself will remember if she wore a ring or a diamond bracelet or gloves, but she may not remember on which arm she wore the bracelet. Therefore I must have an exact note of what she wore.

"You can realise how important this is when it comes to fitting the scenes together. You know that films are shot out of sequence—it's not like a play, running straight through—the end is sometimes filmed before the beginning. Now when it comes to fitting the pieces together it must not have any mistakes or it won't fit. For instance, if in one scene a girl goes out of a door with a hat on and is shown in the following scene going into the street without a hat it doesn't match. This may only be discovered when the cutting is being done—I'll explain about that later—and therefore the two scenes won't fit together. Either they will have to let a bad mistake go through and hope it won't be noticed—which it probably will be as there are people who revel in triumphantly pointing out errors—or at great cost to the company the actors may have to be re-assembled and the scene shot all over again."

"But how terrifying," said Frances. "Do you mean to say that the whole thing might have to be done again because the continuity girl had failed to notice something?"

"Well, it's quite an important job," smiled Lena, "but don't worry. What you must do, if you're going to train yourself to be any good, is to work out your own system of noting everything. Don't necessarily do it my way. For instance, now I don't need to note as much as I used to when I first started because I've

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learned what is relevant, but to begin with I wrote pages and pages of notes about everything.

"To start with, I suggest you take charge of costumes, from today. I'll do them as well, but forget about me and try to feel you're the only one doing it. Note down every detail of costume of each of the principals and extras. But have a system. I do basic clothes —tweed suit, dinner jacket, etc.—and then accessories, worn first, carried second, and I do the right side before the left; but you work out your own way. One thing, I should check the costumes, if you can, *before* the actors come back on the set so as to leave enough time to watch out for things like earrings, which they take off at lunch because they pinch—things like that."

"What's the best thing to write it on?"

"I'll give you a shorthand notebook. I've got a spare one in my desk. Here you are. I'd tie the pencil to it if I were you. I found I was always losing my pencil at vital moments when I started. Go where you like, but don't get under Mr. Paardin's feet until he gets more used to seeing you around."

Frances promised and set off towards the set, feeling for the first time that she really had a right to be there. Her notebook was like a membership card. She felt suddenly confident; she could go where she liked, speak to whoever she liked and perhaps begin in a small way to take her part. She stood quite close to the edge of the scene and began to note the costumes of the extras who were already standing about waiting for the next rehearsal to begin.

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"Like a cup o' tea, ducks?" said a voice behind Frances. She turned to see a man in a pair of overalls grinning at her.

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"Yes, please," she said. "Where's it come from? I thought we had to go outside for it."

"Ah, we brews it on the spot," said the man. "Two-pence, please."

Frances had left her bag in Lena's desk.

"That's all right, m'love, pay me later," he said, as he disappeared with a huge white canful of dark brown tea.

Frances looked round to see where on earth they could make tea among all the bits of scenery and cables. The man adjusting the microphone on the long boom laughed.

"Sparks has always got some tea. I don't think he does anything else. Is that all right, Harry?" he called down to the sound man in the pram affair, who was sitting opposite his dials with earphones on.

Michael Stein came up. "Hello, Frances," he said. "Starting work in earnest?" Then he called out to the sound man who had been speaking to her.

"Raise it a bit—there's a shadow of the mike on the wall. Does that clear it, Richard?" he called across to the camera operator, who was sitting in the camera seat looking through the lens.

"O.K., fine now."

Frances scribbled frantically, feeling stupid as she could not remember the names for various items. What, for instance, were those knickerbocker things called worn by gentlemen attached to the court? Should she know the various orders and stars which several of the men wore, or was it enough to put "purple ribbon with gold cross"?

She saw one of the extras remove her bracelet because the clasp seemed to be loose and made a mental note to tell Lena. People were standing round the edge of the set watching the Director who was discuss-

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ing something intently with the Lighting Cameraman. She noticed the Prince of Wales, sitting in a canvas-backed chair which had the Director's name printed in red across the back. She then saw that there was a similar chair for each of the principals, but everyone seemed to sit where they liked.

She went as close as she dared and began to note down what he wore. It was a magnificent-looking costume, correct, she supposed, to the smallest detail, as he did look exactly like the portrait of Edward VII which she remembered seeing in a history book. He was explaining at some length to a man in a polo-necked sweater, whom Frances had never seen before, how to train a falcon. He looked very gay, she thought, and utterly unlike her idea of a film star. His enormously powerful voice rang through the studio and he seemed unaware of anything except the imaginary bird he was describing, holding his huge wrist up in front of him as though he had a hooded falcon chained to it.

"James!" called Mr. Paardin. "I can't hear myself think."

Frances looked at the Director in surprise. He was actually smiling. Could it be that he was reasonably human, too?

Robertson Justice shook with laughter.

"I was just whispering a few things to old Peter here," he shouted back exuberantly. "I'll go outside if you like."

"No, don't do that. We'll want you in a minute."

Frances was standing near the sound man in the pram, who smiled.

"It's double the work when he's around," he said. "Have to whip down the volume as soon as he opens his mouth."

"Do you control the sound, then?" asked Frances.

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"Yes, with these dials and knobs here."

"How many people are there connected with the sound?"

"There's myself, Ben—that tall man with the boom mike—and the sound camera crew."

"Where are they?"

"They're over there, the other side of the set, behind the scene." Frances noticed he had the hand part of a telephone lying beside the dials. He picked it up and switched something.

"Paul," he said into the phone, "I think we shan't be long now—give me a ring when you're ready. Oh, you're O.K. now." He smiled at Frances. "Sound's always ready first," he said.

"Sometimes," he continued, putting down the phone, "the recording truck stands outside the studio and you can go inside and hear the sound track there."

"I wish I knew more how it all worked," said Frances.

"You will do, in no time. Come and ask me anything you want to know, any time."

Frances thanked him. She saw Joyce Grenfell step across the floor in the same beautiful lime green dress she had worn yesterday. Lena went up to speak to her and Frances drew near to note her costume.

"I simply can't remember whether I wore this ring on the left or the right hand. Can you tell me which it was?"

"Fourth finger, right hand," said Lena without a moment's hesitation. Then seeing Frances she introduced her.

"Are you doing this continuity work, too," Miss Grenfell asked in a friendly way with a smile. "I should think you need eyes in the back of your head."

"My trouble at the moment," said Frances desper-

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ately, "is to know how to use the ones I've got in front."

Miss Grenfell laughed.

"When you're trained, you'll make a wonderful detective, I should think. I wouldn't like to be the criminal with Lena around."

"Rehearsal!" shouted Michael Stein, and people began to move to their appointed positions.

The camera was pointing through the door from the ballroom into the library. The Prince of Wales was seen sitting down with three others to play bridge. Mrs. Keppel, the Prince's hostess, was excused to attend to her other guests in the ballroom. As she walked towards the camera she was followed by the three young officers who had entered with the Prince of Wales. The camera had to roll back as they advanced into the ballroom. As they walked the dialogue ran:

"Who is this new beauty? She is astonishingly lovely."

"My dear Lascelles, you *have* been buried in Dorset. It's the divine Alicia. Haven't you heard of the play at Drury Lane, 'The Princess of Astrakhan'?"

"She went to the Duchess of Devonshire's ball the other day and they say people stood up on chairs to get a better look at her."

"I must be introduced. Who'll introduce me?"

They rehearsed this seven or eight times, as the camera had to move back smoothly as they came forward and the last line had to be said as they came level with the fireplace. In the corner by the roses Alicia could be seen surrounded by a group of men. Mrs. Keppel, standing just inside the door, overheard the three officers and, gliding up to Richard Todd, said softly: "I will, Lascelles, but mind your manners."

The camera followed them in the distance as the

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presentation took place. There was no dialogue, only the noise of background laughter and conversation. When this was satisfactorily performed, after five takes, the camera was set up for a close-up of Richard Todd and Alicia.

Frances did a check of her costume notes but found it took ages to do. She wondered if she could possibly make a lightning sketch of the clothes and write in the details.

Alicia, sitting on the tapestry sofa now, was staring straight ahead muttering to herself. Frances, standing just on one side of the camera, wondered if she were feeling all right, then realised that she was saying her lines over and over. She looked tense and anxious.

Mr. Paardin came up to sit beside her on the sofa. Frances wished she could hear what they were saying but there was too much noise all around them. Again, what seemed like a long period of waiting took place, but Frances was beginning to get some idea of what was being done. The place where Richard Todd would stand was marked by a flat piece of wood which was hammered into place by the carpenter. The Camera Assistant measured the distance from the camera to Alicia with a tape measure which was fixed at one end to the camera. The microphone was swung into the exact position, and Mr. Paardin came up to the camera to peer through the lens.

“Quiet please, rehearsal.”

“Playback!”

Immediately the Director had shouted this, the sound of a waltz filled the whole of the studio as if by magic. After only a second or two, the Director waved his hand and the music dropped to a faint lilt in the background.

“You seem bored,” the dialogue began.

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Alicia no longer looked tense and anxious. Raising her large grey eyes to Richard Todd, who was standing by the sofa looking down at her, she looked serene and relaxed.

"I am sorry. I have only been spoken to by two kinds of people tonight—those who came to stare at me and those who wished to talk about themselves."

"The first flattering but fruitless, the second a grueling test of patience, I imagine."

Alicia looked up at the young officer with more interest.

"Certainly, for me. I am not a patient person. I do not hunt. I know nothing about racing, and the scandal about Lady X is tedious as I have never met the lady."

Lascelles laughed.

"To be so soon bored with the leading society of the day is a new pose. I hope the fashion will not spread or we shall have nothing left to talk about but politics."

"And a woman has no right to an opinion in such matters, I suppose?"

"Men are afraid of women who talk politics. If they are ugly, politics bore them, if pretty they feel they are wasting time, if beautiful"—here, he paused just long enough to underline the word and make it a compliment to her, which by a movement of her head she acknowledged—"they are fearful they may be forced to change their opinions."

Alicia laughed, and for the first time smiled directly at Lascelles. He had succeeded in piquing her curiosity. At last, she seemed to say, here is an attractive man.

Frances was fascinated; she could not take her eyes off the players. Each time it was rehearsed, and subsequently in the eight takes which followed, Alicia moved her head in exactly the same way and lowered her eyes

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on the same word, which had the identical inflexion she had given it the first time.

She was caught, too, by the atmosphere of attraction they had built up between them. Lascelles had eyes for no one else, and gradually Alicia's interest in him was aroused. The studio seemed to feel it too—there was a taut silence, which only relaxed, like air let out of a balloon, when the Director shouted "Cut!"

Frances was in a daze. She dimly saw the Director tell Lena something and heard her say "Print numbers three, five and eight," to the Number Boy, who used to be called the Clapper Boy, because in the old days he used to bang two pieces of wood together to mark the new take on the sound track.

"I shall have to get over this if I'm to be any good," she thought, for she had completely forgotten what she was supposed to be looking for, or noting down.

"That's it, thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Back here at two o'clock." And Frances shook herself awake to realise that after all it was only lunch time.

Chapter 10

The New Flat

THREE days later, on her way to the studio, Frances despatched a telegram to her mother.

“S O S. Found flat. Help move. No time. Love.”

Her mother arrived the following morning, which was a Saturday, with a suitcase full of things she had bought, or dug up at home, for Frances’ new flat.

She helped Frances pack like a whirlwind, taking charge of the operation like the captain of a destroyer. It was true that her daughter had not many things of her own when she began staying at Jessica’s flat, but in the time she had been there, property had unaccountably collected.

As they packed and sorted, Frances talked unceasingly about her new job and how exciting it was and how difficult to understand what she was really supposed to be doing.

“You haven’t told me yet about the flat,” said her mother, who was packing some minute china ornaments.

“It’s marvellous, but I’m a bit scared in case I get slung out after this job. I really should have waited first to see if I made the grade because its five pounds a week, but I couldn’t let it slip. I went over to see it on Thursday night, telephoned the landlord and said ‘Yes’ on the spot. He said I could move in today if I liked. Jessica’s coming home next week, so it’s perfect timing. I couldn’t have turned it down. After all this time plodding up and down stairs looking at miserable holes, this is . . . Well, wait till you see it.”

“It sounds very expensive to me,” said her mother.

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"Well it is, and there's hardly any furniture—don't laugh, there's only one chair in the sitting-room—but it's the whole shape of the flat, the really lovely kitchen and bathroom for instance, that make it just about treble as nice as anything I've seen more completely furnished."

"Hm," said her mother doubtfully. "Is this ashtray yours?"

"No, it's Jessica's, but those mats are mine."

Her mother exclaimed in horror when she saw the piles of washing, the bagful of ironing and mending upstairs, which Frances had not had time to do.

"You must organise things better. What a state everything's in! How can you expect to be efficient in your job if you're in such a state of chaos at home?"

"I don't know. I just don't get time. When I get back at about eight, I'm whacked."

"Well, you must make time. You must have someone who will come in for an hour and clean and perhaps shop for you. You can't do everything on Saturday."

"I can't afford it, Mummy, with a rent like that."

"That's just what I think—why are you paying so much? Surely you could find something more reasonable?"

"I've been looking for ages, I tell you. There's nothing. I'd rather slave on Saturday and Sunday in this new place than have help every day of the week anywhere else."

"Well, I suppose you must go your own way, but I think it's ridiculous to pay so much. You've got income tax to pay, don't forget. And what will happen if you're worn out on Monday morning? It sounds a very tiring job to me, with all this standing about. I should think you'd need a complete rest at the weekend. I don't think you're at all sensible."

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Frances was polishing the brass door-knocker. She looked ruefully round the door at her mother who was tying up a large parcel.

"I'm sure I've heard you come to that conclusion before," she said with a smile.

"I wonder why," her mother retorted. "Can it be that there's some truth in it?"

About three hours later the flat was left far cleaner than she had found it. Frances sat down and scribbled a note to Jessica, giving her her new address and telephone number, thanking her for the flat and telling her to ring her up as soon as she got back. The keys she would leave with the tobacconist at the corner.

She took a quick look round to see that everything was as Jessica had left it. It suddenly looked cold and un-lived in. She decided that however tired she was after the studio on Tuesday, she must come over and arrange some flowers on the big table and leave Jessica some milk, bread and eggs.

She followed her mother out to the taxi, slamming the front door, thinking as she did so how much her life had changed since she first came there such a short time ago, full of apprehensions and doubts. "Even if they sling me out at the end of this film," she thought, "as they probably will, I know the sort of thing I want to do, and I swear I will never put up with a job which doesn't excite me, if I can possibly help it, again."

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The new flat was above a chemist's shop just off Goodge Street.

"Now," said Frances, flinging back the door, "here you are! My first very own flat!"

A narrow passage faced them but it looked light and

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clean. The walls were painted white and the dark grey carpet was fitted and looked strong and warm. The first door on the right was the bathroom.

Her mother looked in and gave her approval.

The second door on the right was the kitchen. Without going any further, Frances' mother succumbed. It was painted white and had a green and white table and two green stools. The electric cooker looked like a fairly recent model and the sink fitting was shiny aluminium. There was a door out of the kitchen leading on to a minute roof which had been fenced in. Someone had put large window-boxes all round it and had started to grow herbs, but they looked neglected and weedy.

"I could easily grow all sorts of things here," said Frances excitedly. "Look, here's a bit of parsley!"

Her mother was looking up at the backs of flats and offices which towered round them on all sides.

"I don't really like the idea of you living alone here very much. Couldn't you possibly share with somebody?"

"I'll see," said Frances. "Maybe. But I shall be as safe here as the Stone of Scone. The building over there is a big police station. I've only to raise my voice to produce a posse of Bobbies."

Her mother looked across at the large modern building. A powerful-looking Mrs. Mop was shaking a gay multicoloured feather duster out of a window.

"Do you suppose she keeps that for the superintendent's desk?" asked Frances.

"Perhaps it's for flicking the dust off the incriminating evidence."

They both laughed and went back into the kitchen.

Her mother began to unpack some of the things she had brought: a tablecloth for the kitchen table in

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squares of green and scarlet; a scarlet-handled mop; some screw-top jars; a box of eggs; and a milk saucepan.

“What’s this glass thing?” said Frances, picking up something which looked like the glass top of a bottling jar.

“That’s a present from Pauline. She bought me one, too. It’s a none-boiler-overer.”

“Good gracious, what happens?”

“You put it in the saucepan of milk and when it boils, the glass whatnot prevents it boiling over. It simply rattles in an agitated way to let you know it’s ready.”

“How amazing! It seems so simple, I wonder that nobody’s thought of it before.”

“Oh, and here’s a tin-opener from John. He says he knows that all girls who live alone eat out of tins. But I do hope you will eat properly,” added her mother.

“With my appetite? Don’t worry, darling. And this job makes me fearfully hungry.”

“Oh, I nearly forgot. Simon gave me this letter for you.”

“Thanks,” said Frances briefly. She guessed her mother had not forgotten at all. She stuck the letter indifferently on the mantelpiece without opening it.

They had a quick lunch at a café on the opposite corner of the street and returned to the attack.

By tea-time it was beginning to look like a personal home, in spite of the lack of furniture. Fired by her mother’s gathering enthusiasm, Frances began to get new ideas—up till then she had been simply content with the whole flat and had not had time for more.

“I’ll make you some royal blue cushions,” said her mother. “It’s crying out for colour.”

CONTINUITY GIRL

"I'd love to buy a really gay picture to put over the fireplace—or do you think a mirror?"

Her mother promised to poke about in the attic at home to see what she could dig up. At half-past six, Frances went with her to Victoria Station and saw her on to the train.

As she was leaving the station, the door of a parked car swung open and someone called out her name. It was dark under the covered entrance and she couldn't see who it was, but the car looked like some old sports model which had seen better days.

Bobbing her head down to look inside, she recognised Richard, the camera-operator. He was leaning forward and holding open the door.

"Extraordinary place, London. You always see the people you least want to see. Get in."

"Why?" she asked. "Do I remind you of work?"

"Get in. I can't hold this door open any longer. Now, where are you going?"

"I'm going home," said Frances.

"Good heavens, a pretty girl like you?"

"Thank you very much," said Frances. "You revive me. I've been moving flats all day."

"You must have been busy! Where have you moved them to?"

Frances laughed.

"I thought I'd begin in a small way and then try my hand at moving a mountain."

"Mind you start with a very little one! The secret is, I believe, to creep up behind and surprise them."

He started the car and drove out into the traffic. Frances' window fell down with a bang but he reached across her and pulled it up unconcernedly.

"That always happens when I let in the clutch," he said. "Dinner?"

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He took her to dinner at a Greek restaurant in the King's Road. Frances wondered why he had been waiting at Victoria Station but did not feel able to ask him. He offered no information about himself. They immediately began to talk about the film, and Frances listened fascinated. The personalities who had been so strange to her began to take shape as people under his scandalous and gay descriptions of their private and public lives.

He was rather an attractive person, she decided; in his early thirties, she supposed. He had a very young, lean-looking face but there was an air about him of experience and poise that made her think he was older than he looked. He had a funny sideways smile out of the corner of his mouth which somehow reminded her a little of Hank.

"Tell me about cameras," said Frances. "How do you get on one in the first place?"

"It's a long business," he said. "First, if you are extraordinarily lucky, you get taken into the Union. Then you're the dogsbody, the fourth member of the camera crew—the fetcher of tea and runner of messages. The camera crew have got to have someone like that, who gets the new rolls of film and helps load the camera, takes a tactful message to the lighting cameraman's wife when she's on the phone and he can't leave the set, and so on. Then you move up one, learning hard all the time about angles and close-ups—the works. After about ten years you may become a camera operator, as I did, but the next step is the biggest; from operator to lighting cameraman is a tougher jump and the salary is correspondingly higher. The move to director follows after that, if your luck holds!"

"Is that what you want to be—a director?"

"Surely I do. With some directors, who don't know

CONTINUITY GIRL

their stuff, the camera operator very often directs the film more or less himself. I've several times been in that position and it's the game for me, but of course I'd like a director's salary to go with it. Do you like this Greek wine?" he said suddenly, as if he had talked enough about himself.

"Well, it's a bit strange. I've never had it before."

"It grows on you. Have another glass and you'll find you'll like it better. It doesn't taste potent, but it is."

Perhaps the wine had already gone to her head a little.

"I like you," she said suddenly, out of the blue. "Do you know, you haven't said once this evening that filming is a crazy business?"

Richard looked at her quickly.

"It's a wonderful life," he said. "I wouldn't do anything else in the world."

"Show business?" she said quizzically.

"Yes, that, and so much more."

But again he didn't seem to want to talk about it.

"Well, going-home time," he said. He paid the bill and drove her back to the flat.

"See you too soon on Monday," he said cheerfully, and drove off.

Chapter 11

The New Set

IT was not until Frances arrived at the Studio on Monday morning that she remembered Lena's last words on Friday about the new set. They had finished with the ballroom scene and she had to find her way to Stage 4.

Following one of the sign-posts she entered another long corridor, parallel, she realised, to the first one she had set foot in a week ago, but in a building farther up the "street". Walking right down the passage she found the door at the end and, pulling it open, discovered herself in a new studio.

Facing her was the back of a huge curtain, hung from a wooden crosspiece, that seemed almost to reach the roof. There was a lot of hammering going on from the other side but she couldn't see because the scenery was between her and the set.

At that moment Miss Burrows appeared from one of the narrow spaces left between the back of the scenery and the huge switchboard, a mass of terrifying black boxes and plunger switches which seemed to cover a quarter of the outside wall of the studio.

"'Morning, dear,'" she said cheerfully to Frances as she stepped over the snaking cables. "I've just given your Director my word that the set will be finished inside the hour . . . !" She gave a friendly grimace. "If it wasn't for the Union, I'd get going with a hammer myself. Don't speak to me about them," Miss Burrows continued. "In the old days we'd have all mucked in to get it finished. Now if I so much as drive a drawing-pin

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into the wall the whole place will be out on strike. Now I've got to find two incense burners for 'The Red Hat' on Stage two and a Coalport teapot in half-an-hour for 'Barchester Towers'. Don't stop me, dear, that's only the beginning of my troubles."

Frances had no intention of stopping her, and had only stood still because she had been spoken to, but Miss Burrows was like a field-marshall; her energy and wits worked at full charge all the time, however absorbed she appeared to be.

"If you want to find your way to the set," she said over her shoulder, realising that it was new to Frances, "go straight down where you saw me come from till you come to a gap in the scenery. Look out for the pot of whitewash!" and she disappeared.

Frances, duly avoiding the large bucket, treacherously placed in the middle of her path, came up to the gap. Going through she found herself standing in the middle of a brightly lit auditorium. Opposite her was a row of boxes on the level of her head and above them a slightly smaller row. Then she realised that the same double layer of boxes was repeated behind her. Joining them across the far end was the proscenium, with an enormous red velvet curtain decorated with a deep panel of gold Roman key pattern along the bottom. This was the curtain she had seen from the back when she came in.

Workmen were busy in all the boxes, painting, hammering and arranging the red velvet-backed chairs. One man was leaning out of a box at a dangerous angle to nail the draped red velvet in place below the gold-painted ledge of the royal box, which had a little crown above it. She wondered, as a matter of interest, how much the velvet cost as there must have been hundreds of yards of it, and also what happened to it

THE NEW SET

when the set was taken down. Extras were standing about or sitting on all the available chairs. Between the boxes, where the stalls would be in a real theatre, was just the plain wooden floor of the studio.

Lena's desk was under the larger of the boxes on Frances' side, but she was nowhere to be seen.

"Good morning, Frances," said a voice above her, and looking up she saw Michael Stein, the Assistant Director. He was standing in the box with his arms crossed.

"Chaos this morning," he said to her. Someone called him from the opposite box and he cupped his hand to his ear.

"What? Oh! All right," and he leapt over the top of the box and landed with a thump beside Frances. "Watch out for Mr. Paardin," he said to her in a conspiratorial whisper. "I think the sparks will fly today," and went across to speak to the man who had called him.

Frances looked around for Richard and saw him on a large platform which had been constructed behind one of the façades to bring the camera to the level of the first row of boxes. It was constructed at an angle from the back of the box to allow the camera to photograph inside the box where Michael had been standing and also to roll forward and have an unobstructed view of the opposite boxes through the front of the box itself. Richard waved to her but looked preoccupied.

Frances studied the scene they were supposed to shoot today, where Alicia is presented to the Prince of Wales in the Royal Box. She prepared the eight copies of the Daily Continuity Report for Lena, which had to be typed for each shot, and glanced at the Call Sheet, which gave the names of each actor needed that day, with the time they had to be at the studio to allow for

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make-up, the dressing-room number and the time they had to be ready on the set.

The action and dialogue actually shot had to be typed out as soon as possible. Lena tried to keep up with each scene as it was shot, but told Frances that some continuity girls leave it all till the evening and then sit down and do it in a lump, or some take it home and type it after dinner, but to Frances, Lena's method seemed the best, although it was not always possible to keep up, and she did not think she would ever develop sufficient concentration to enable her to type away merrily while bedlam was going on around her.

Lena appeared suddenly and sat down to explain a little more to her. Each morning, before things really got under way, she made a point of teaching Frances something, and Frances, listening eagerly, wrote down vital points in a small red notebook.

All last week she had made notes about the clothes. To her surprise and dismay, however careful she seemed to be she always missed something when she came to compare her notes with Lena's. But Lena told her not to worry, that it was a question of training her eye and she was pleased that Frances had done as well as she had. By the end of the week she felt a little surer of herself and her method, and found it was simpler to concentrate when the panicky feeling that she might forget something had somewhat died down.

Lena now let her take notes of scenery and props and made her follow the dialogue in her script, noting any changes which were made in the actual takes of movement or dialogue.

Each day she began to realise how much more there was to the job than she had at first thought. Lena had only touched on camera angles, close-ups and cuts, but Frances began dimly to understand how much she had

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to learn. Lena told her that a good continuity girl can be of great use to a director, particularly an inexperienced one (for, strange as it was, there were many such in the business—men who had been stage directors, actors and so on) by being able to point out a good place to cut a scene, to prevent a cut at an awkward place, to remind the director to take close-ups and a hundred small details which might be overlooked.

A continuity girl was also the link between the "floor" and the cutting-room, where the hundreds of yards of shot film were edited. They received each day a copy of Lena's typed dialogue as filmed the previous day, and they could see immediately where it digressed, to however small a degree, from the original script. It was up to the continuity girl, too, to point out anything special which might have happened. Then the editor ran the film through a miniature screen and cut out the bits which would not be needed and joined each scene to the next.

Lena told her that as they would be late in starting that morning it might be an excellent opportunity to go along to the cutting-room and see for herself. She drew a little map for Frances so that she could find the right place, and went in search of Mr. Paardin who was going through some of Alicia's dialogue with her and Steven Myers, the dialogue director, in her dressing-room.

She found the office just behind the stage in which the "rushes" were shown at the end of each day's filming. When the director had taken the scene to his and the technical crews' satisfaction, he would order a certain number of "takes" to be printed. It was Lena's responsibility to take down the numbers from the director and pass them on to the Camera and Sound crews respectively. For instance, with a colour film,

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the director might decide to have the second, fifth and sixth takes printed in colour and the first and third printed in black and white, just to see how it went and in case, for some reason or other, the colour takes were not satisfactory. If the black and white takes were better, the director could order them to be printed up in colour. If, for any reason, none of the picked numbers should prove acceptable, then the director would order the other takes to be printed, but this did not happen very often. At the end of the day, the actors, cameraman, etc., piled into the theatre and watched the selected "takes" projected on to a full-size screen. Frances had now started to go regularly to see the rushes and found it a fascinating business. She liked to watch the director and stars out of the corner of her eye. Mr. Paardin usually sat forward on the edge of his chair staring fixedly at the screen, and only spoke in monosyllables to give his approval or otherwise. Many of the actors were tense with nerves and showed it in various ways; some exclaimed in horror at what they had done, some gazed with a wondering delight at their screen selves, and there were one or two who looked down at the floor and didn't look up until their images had left the screen.

The cutting-room was small and rather bleak. Three sides of the room had wide wooden shelves, on which were stacked hundreds of aluminium canisters of film, on the fourth side was a large cupboard and a window. In the middle of the room were two strange black instruments standing on pedestals about three feet from the ground. Everywhere there were strips of film, curling in heaps on the floor, draped round the shelf ends, hung on the back of the door and round the necks of the four men working in the room in their shirt-sleeves.

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Frances introduced herself rather shyly and asked if she might get in the way for five minutes. A fifth man, rather younger than the others, came in with a pile of canisters up to his chin and began to arrange them on the shelves. They all shook hands with her and stopped working, as if glad of the excuse.

The editor, whose name was Wilson Ottmayer and who wore gloves, turned a switch on one of the instruments and began to feed a strip of film into it. Immediately Frances saw a part of the scene they had shot last week in the ballroom, but in miniature. She supposed the tiny screen was about two inches square, a sort of dwarf's cinema. The film rattled through at great speed and although it was in colour it was difficult to see the action very well. Frances asked how on earth he managed to see anything at that speed, but he clicked another switch and stopped it altogether so that she could stare at one "frame" like a still photograph.

He explained to her that he saw the scenes so often that the smallest things showed up. If, for instance, when Alicia made her curtsey to the Prince of Wales she was wearing her aigrette on the left side of her head, and then later, in the close-up where she talked to Lascelles wore it on the right, it would stick out like a sore thumb.

"And you will curse the continuity girl," said Frances, with a grin.

"Precisely," said Mr. Ottmayer with another cheerful grin.

Frances became serious.

"But it seems so awfully difficult to see all these fearful errors beforehand and avoid them. I am more terrified than ever now. Doesn't it take years to make a good continuity girl?"

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The men exchanged glances. Mr. Ottmayer smiled.

"Well, you might say it does. I should say about four pictures to make a good continuity girl, if she has got it in her, and four more before she can be any help to a director. To start with, they usually work on second feature films. You've been very lucky to get on a first feature film so soon. However, there are always exceptions. Look at Lena, now, she's been at it for years but she was always hot stuff—she's one of the top ones in the business, you know. Mr. Paardin asked specially for her. But even she is not infallible. Where's that Brighton bit, Johnnie?"

Johnnie, Mr. Ottmayer's assistant, pulled a strip from one of the piles on the floor, which had evidently been discarded, and held it up to the light. He handed it to Mr. Ottmayer, who fed it into the miniature projector. Frances, to her delight, saw one of the scenes which had been taken earlier on location, of Alicia and Lascelles and party bathing at Brighton. She recognised the beach at once, and wished she had been there for the filming. They all wore incredible bathing suits to the knees, and Alicia had a cap covered with little rubber flowers.

"See this bit," said Mr. Ottmayer. "Look closely to your right and you'll see a woman in black standing on the steps of the bathing machine holding a towel. Now comes the close-up of Lascelles wading in, now it cuts back to the woman again and you'll see she has no towel."

"What are you going to do?" asked Frances.

"Luckily it so happens we're cutting this bit out altogether—there's only one shot of Lascelles shivering on the edge of the bathing machine steps; this one's been ditched. We shoot, you know, hundreds and hundreds of feet of film; for instance, with this one

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we've got about 150,000 feet already and the final film will only be about 7,000 feet long."

Frances gasped. It seemed a fearful waste of film.

Mr. Ottmayer laughed at her expression.

"Ah, but this director knows what he's doing, he's an able character. The last film I did, the director was an ex-editor and he believed in taking every angle just in case he was going to need it. Did we sweat through that one! What we like in here is just one take."

"How did you get this job?" asked one of the assistant cutters, staring at her curiously.

"Entirely by luck," said Frances. "But I'm very much on trial. When Lena has to go, I believe I've got to do one scene completely alone and I'm terrified. I pray something will happen to keep her here."

The men laughed. Mr. Ottmayer patted her on the shoulder.

"Don't worry," he said. "To be plunged in quickly on your own is the best possible way of learning—there's no better, believe me. You'll make out all right. Come and see us up here whenever you like and perhaps we can help. I had a girl for a year as assistant here and she's gone to continuity and is doing a first-class job. She got used to some of the snags and snarls here, which is probably the best training ground of all, short of actually doing the job. Good luck anyway."

Frances said goodbye and thanked them. She made her way back to the "Countess Alicia" set thinking how kind and co-operative they had been to such a complete newcomer.

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When she got back to the set, the electrically controlled outside door, through which the scenery was

CONTINUITY GIRL

shifted, was closed. She went into the corridor and found the red light was on and the outer studio door was hermetically sealed. She realised they must be shooting and was anxious; she had been away longer than she should have been. It made her realise, with a sudden shock of responsibility, that when she was on her own she would not be able to leave the set for a moment, even to spend a penny, unless she could be absolutely certain that there would be a long hold-up.

She walked up and down on the narrow strip of tough carpeting laid down the middle of the corridor and wondered how long they would be. The fourth member of the camera crew came up carrying a large flat black box which contained the re-load of film. It was shaped like two black circles, each about the size of a flan tin, joined along the middle. He was a large cheerful-looking man with black curly hair.

“What’s happening in there?” Frances asked him.

“They’re doing the arrival of the Prince in the Royal Box.”

“But I thought everyone stood up and sang the National Anthem; there aren’t enough extras for that, surely?”

“No, no, that’s been taken already at Drury Lane Theatre—the view of the stalls with everyone standing up—they’ll just use the playback today.”

Frances knew that the “playback” was a previous recording of sound effects, dialogue or music which was “played back” to accompany the actors.

“Did they take Alicia coming forward to take her curtain calls at Drury Lane too? I imagine we can’t do it here because there are no footlights and no scenery, nothing behind the curtain at all?”

“That’s right. That’s all been taken. Now we’re doing the boxes and the people in them concerned

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with the story. Alicia going up to the Royal Box and making her curtsey. All the crowned 'eads o' Europe lookin' on—luverley grub," he finished in execrable Cockney, his smile drawing up his mouth even nearer to his ears than before.

The light flashed off and they were able to go in. Inside, there was a general air of relaxation after the tension of the scene, and the vast electrically-controlled door, like a large piece of the wall, slid slowly open to let in some air.

Frances was hurrying towards Lena's desk before she realised that it had been moved. Before she could change direction, Mr. Paardin appeared from behind the camera and seeing her said suddenly, "I've got to have the megaphone for this next bit. Can you get it quickly?"

Frances said crisply, "Certainly. Right away." And hurriedly turned round to go back where she had come from so as to hide her vacant expression. Megaphone? She had seen photographs with directors using them, but never Mr. Paardin. Where would she find one? Whom could she ask?

Round the back of the scenery to her relief she saw Richard, leaning over the wooden balustrade of the camera platform. She asked him in a hurried whisper where she might find a megaphone.

"Ask Props," he said briskly. "There he is. George!" he called. And the said George disappeared into a corner and reappeared with one in a moment with a self-satisfied look as if he really had conjured it from thin air.

"The guv'nor wants it, does he?" he said, and when Frances nodded, hurried off to give it to the Director. She thought perhaps she ought to have taken it to him herself, but was still afraid of treading on anyone's toes

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until she had the complicated system of film hierarchy thoroughly worked out in her own mind.

"Going to the pictures tonight?" she heard one of the men on the arc lamps call down to her tea friend, Sparks.

"Yah," he called back derisively, "I don't go to the pictures, I makes 'em."

Chapter 12

Richard

SIMON's letter was not what she expected at all. It said: "Dear Frances, So sorry to bother you but my sister, who as you know has just finished her training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, wants me to ask you if there is the smallest part she might get on the film you are going to work on. I don't know if it has been cast yet, but if you could get her an introduction I should be very grateful indeed. Yours."

Her first reaction was one of annoyance. Just because she was in the film business, everyone who knew her would think she would be able to help them get a job, whereas she probably knew less than they did. Was she going to be pestered by every May, Anne and Jane who wanted to act, or direct, or whatever it was. Then she felt ashamed. Because she had had the great luck to land such a job, surely it was up to her to help anyone who asked her. It was so very easy, from the inside, to take up a lordly attitude—a sort of "Go to the devil, I'm fine" feeling, which in no time, if she wasn't careful, might turn her into another Rosemary Wolf or Miss French. She decided to ask Lena's advice, which was that she should go and see the Casting Director.

The Casting Director turned out to be a woman, very tall and gracious. She told Frances that her friend would have to join Equity, the Actor's Union, and that she should have an agent who would try and obtain parts for her. But there was a big film coming up with a number of small parts, and she promised to

CONTINUITY GIRL

make a note of the name and address, and call her for an interview. Frances thanked her and promised herself that she would write that very night, giving a careful report to Simon's sister explaining exactly what she had to do.

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Two weeks had passed. Now, in the middle of Frances' third week one or two things seemed to have clicked into place. She knew who everyone was, and called everyone by their first name, or nickname, except Mr. Paardin and the Lighting Cameraman, who moved about the studio preoccupied and as though they breathed a different sort of air from everyone else. She also knew more or less what she was supposed to be doing, although that was a long way from being able to do it properly.

The scene they were doing today was Alicia's dressing-room at the theatre, towards the end of the film, when she hears the news that Lascelles has been sent to Holland by the Prince of Wales. There has been no message from him, no letter, nothing. She is at first convinced that his family, above all his dragon of a mother, have persuaded him to give her up.

The American producer, who has been pestering her to sign a contract to go to New York when the play opens there, storms up and down her flower-filled dressing-room, with the gas lights flaring round the make-up mirror, railing at her for hazarding her career by not going. To him it is inconceivable that she should even hesitate. Alicia, distracted and dispirited, finally signs in a moment of misery, and determines never again to put her faith in love but to devote herself to her career and stand proudly on her own feet.

RICHARD

"Cut, cut, cut, cut!" shouted Mr. Paardin after the first take. He was in a very irritable and highly-strung mood.

"Take it straight, play it straight," he said in a fury to Neale Farquharson, who played the American producer. "Stop playing it like a Victorian melodrama. This piece is over-loaded with sentiment—I've told you, the only hope is to make it natural. Sentimental or not, the people were real, they felt things like you, I suppose, do. You're alive in those days, for God's sake. You want this girl to star in New York more than you wanted your mother's milk. This girl's got it in her to make big money for you—now I'm talking, uh? Play it like a human being, even though you are in costume."

Neale looked abashed—he'd apparently thought he was doing rather well.

Someone from the Productions Department came up to Frances and whispered, "Ask Mr. Paardin if we can strike Stage two?" This meant that permission was asked for the workmen to dismantle the opera set. Only the director could give permission if he was entirely satisfied with the scenes shot there, otherwise it might be needed again for a re-take.

"I can't ask him now," said Frances firmly.

"But I must know—they're waiting to go ahead."

But she remained firm. "I'll ask him as soon as I can," she said, with a smile. She could just imagine what would happen if she stopped Mr. Paardin in the middle of the scene to ask him what he would rightly consider was an irrelevant question.

Mrs. White, who was in charge of Publicity for R.O.C. Studios, tiptoed up to her.

"When will this be through, do you think?" she asked, in a hissing whisper, "because I've got two

CONTINUITY GIRL

reporters to see Miss Ellice as soon as she's free. One's from *Time Magazine*, the other from the French magazine *Elle?*"

"I think we may be rather long," said Frances. She had unconsciously slipped into using the "we".

"Well, let me know, there's a dear."

She tiptoed away. A voice from over Frances' head whispered. "How the news does get around. New star, new star—the vultures gather." It was Richard, looking down at her from his seat on the camera dolly. "They say it's pouring outside. I hope to hell I haven't left any of the car windows open."

Mr. Paardin stalked back to his position by the camera, Lena following him.

The Assistant Director called for silence, the bell rang, Richard was asked if he was all set, and when he gave his O.K., the Assistant Director shouted "Turn over", the number of the take was called and the Director ordered "Action!"

Alicia had obviously been upset by the interruption and she muffed her lines twice.

"Damn," she said loudly, in her beautiful melodious voice. "I knew the lines perfectly in my dressing-room. It's these lights. As soon as I get under these lights I go to pieces. Let me see the script, please."

Frances watched Lena go up to her with the script and show her the bit of dialogue she couldn't remember. Mr. Paardin forgot his bad temper in the crisis of having upset Alicia and called out to her "Four oysters!"

Alicia looked up and smiled. After a moment or two more she said, "O.K., I think I've got it now."

Lena told her later that it was an arrangement between them that Anne Ellice should buy an oyster for the Director every time she messed up a line.

RICHARD

The tension eased, and in three more takes they had what was wanted.

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Lena allowed Frances now to type the Daily Continuity Sheets, but she went through Frances' copy of the dialogue as it had been filmed to be sure that it was completely accurate and tallied with her own. They had to fill in the number of the camera, the lens and focus, number of takes, footage of film used, time taken and which takes had to be printed. They stayed late to finish the Reports and the Diary, on alternate evenings.

Tonight it was her turn. After the rushes, she came back to finish. The studio was eerie with only a few main lights left on, all the arc lights out and the set in darkness. Two men were carrying out the flowers from the dressing-room to a cooler place for the night. One of them laid a dozen red roses on Frances' desk.

"Here you are, these won't last till the morning."

Frances laughed. "Thanks very much," she said. She would cut the stems and plunge them up to their necks in hot water when she got home, to see if she could revive them.

When she found her way out it was still raining quite hard. She dashed for the covered way which led to the entrance building, clutching the roses in her arms in a twist of newspaper to protect herself from the thorns.

Richard appeared from nowhere—his jacket collar turned up and his hair hanging in wet claws all round his face.

"Car's soaking wet," he said. "Got to borrow a ground sheet to sit on. Come on, I'll give you a lift."

When they got to Chalk Farm station, he suddenly stopped the car.

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"Don't mind if I drop you here, do you," he said. "I've got a dinner date and I'm already an hour late."

"No, that's fine, thanks," said Frances getting out, and, wondering why she should feel so disappointed, she continued her way home to the flat by Underground.

Chapter 13

Simon

ON the Friday of the fifth week, the scene they were scheduled to do was the library of a country house. It was a most attractive set—a long room with a large stone fireplace, lined to what would have been the ceiling (if there had been a top to the set) with books on two sides. On the left were high oriel windows showing a formal garden and the estate disappearing into the trees on the horizon. This “view” from the three windows was a painted backcloth, but it was lit from behind the windows and looked wonderfully realistic. It was meant to be a summer afternoon and the curtains were blowing gently in the breeze. Frances discovered that this effect was produced by a wind machine hidden behind the scenery.

In the story, Lascelles had been agreeably surprised by his parents’ sudden suggestion that he should bring Alicia to his home to meet them. But they insist on making it a weekend house-party. Until that moment, his parents had been bitterly against what they call his “association” with an actress. What he does not know is that his father and mother have formed a plot, aimed to show up “the actress” for what she is. They hope that by seeing how clumsily she fits into his background, he will realise how hopeless it would be to marry her and make her the châtelaine of the old estate. They cannot face the horror and disgrace in those days of the heir making a misalliance, especially by marrying an actress, which they consider to be a fate worse than death.

CONTINUITY GIRL

Michael Hordern was playing Lascelles' father, the Earl, and Avice Landone his mother. There were about eight other guests staying in the house, specially selected for their unbending aristocracy to point more clearly to poor Lascelles the moral of the contrast between them and an "actress". What they do not appreciate, never having seen her, is that Alicia is a girl of spirit and intelligence, as well as great beauty, despite her unorthodox upbringing.

When Lascelles brings Alicia into the library to meet his parents the mother, who has worked herself up into a passionate hatred of the girl and is not clever enough to be able to hide her feelings, behaves atrociously, hardly able to bring herself to speak to her. His father, on the other hand, is a much more realistic person, a polished and charming man, very kind, very human; his personality not so well hidden from the world as he supposes by his rather cynical humour and caustic remarks. He is captured immediately by Alicia's beauty and charmingly modest manner and regrets the plot against her. He falls a little in love with her himself.

Alicia looked as though she would indeed win any male heart. She wore a long coat, the colour of marrons glacés, tightly nipped in at the waist and cuffed in chestnut brown velvet. She carried a tiny fur muff. Her wide hat, perched on top of her red hair, had one pale blue ostrich feather. Just visible when she walked were little brown buttoned boots.

Miss Ellice, as everyone called her, seemed in the highest of spirits this morning and was exchanging badinage with Richard Todd. She went and sat down in the Director's canvas-backed chair and picked up a piece of embroidery she was doing to while away the time between takes. The stills photographer, who was

SIMON

always hovering somewhere in the background, saw his opportunity and took two or three pictures before she became aware of him. But she was getting used to cameras and did not alter her position or manner, as the norm of human beings, and a great many actors, do when they become aware of a lens turned on them.

The stills photographer was by now a great friend of Frances. He took pictures almost all the time of the scene and the actors, both on and off the set. He worked fairly closely with Lena and Frances, as his pictures were an invaluable help to them in checking the position of furniture and other props in each scene and a perfect check for costumes.

Lena had a special camera, too, which she could use if she wanted to photograph the set. It fascinated Frances and she was longing to use it. It was called a Polaroid Camera and developed the prints at the back of the camera so that immediately after taking the picture you could pull out the print. If you wished to keep the print, however, for reference, it had to be treated at once with a solution, otherwise it would fade out altogether after an hour or two.

It looked as though they were nearly ready to begin shooting. Miss Ellice's stand-in had been in position for some time so that the camera could line up on her. She stood on a little marker which had been nailed into the floor to show Miss Ellice where she would have to be. The girl looked bored. Frances was sure it must be a very dull job being a stand-in. She had several times tried to talk to the girl, whom she had thought looked so attractive the first time she saw her, but she found her absorbed in her own ambitions and quite incapable, it seemed, of thinking about anything else. As she watched the girl now, from the shadow behind the camera, Frances reflected on the difference between

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Anne Ellice and her stand-in. Outwardly they were both undeniably attractive but somehow this girl seemed to have only the outer shell. What was missing —was it intelligence, was it personality? What was it that made one of them so unmistakably a star, the other just a pretty model?

She began to note down the position of the more solid items of furniture in her notebook. She knew it was useless to do the whole scene now as Mr. Paardin had a habit of moving the props about at the last minute to get the exact effect that he wanted. The Art Director was watching the Director anxiously. He obviously was entirely satisfied with the scene as he had created it, and would take it as a personal affront if so much as a snuff-box were moved among the silver frames and family bric-à-brac arranged on every available flat surface, in the mode of the day.

Two members of the house-party, who were extras, were talking just behind Frances.

“Do you belong to this studio, dear?”

“No, I’m free-lance.”

“I’ve seen you before somewhere. Weren’t you in ‘Goodbye, Mr. Chips’?”

The other looked daggers. “No, dear,” she said, “I was *not*. I haven’t been in films nearly as long as you have.”

“Hmm,” said the first, obviously not believing her. “Strange how you can be mistaken. I could have sworn . . .”

There was a sudden bustle of movement and the Assistant Director called for everyone to come on to the set. Frances watched the two extras take up their places; gracious and elegant they both appeared to be, and it was difficult to remember that they had both been having little vicious digs at each other only two seconds before.

SIMON

Michael Hordern came up to Frances.

"Can you remember if I wore a signet ring in the other scene? I'm sure I did."

Frances quickly flicked back to her notes on the scene referred to as she could not remember either.

"Yes, you did. Little finger of your left hand."

"Thanks very much. I haven't got it now; can you find me one?"

Frances went in search of "Wardrobe", a fluffy little woman who sat like a hen beside a large chest of drawers on wheels. She flung open one of the drawers and picked out a signet ring from a treasure trove of rings, necklaces, bracelets, feathers, belts, gloves and so on. Luckily it fitted.

"Mr. Hordern! Are you ready?" called the Assistant Director.

"Yes," he shouted back. "Are *you*?"

There was general laughter. Everyone seemed to be in a good mood. Frances opened the script on her arm, pulled out her pencil on its long string and settled down to taking the final notes on the Earl of Whitby's library.

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On Saturday morning Frances slept late. She was woken by the telephone ringing; she was amazed to see that it was half-past ten.

"Come and have some lunch with me at Simpsons in the Strand. I'm celebrating!"

It was Simon.

"What are you celebrating?" asked Frances, looking down at the busy street below, where the morning activity was already well advanced.

"I'll tell you at lunch. Thanks very much for your letter to my sister. Is one o'clock all right?"

Frances agreed. He sounded gay, much more as he

CONTINUITY GIRL

used to be when she first knew him, before they had started to quarrel.

It turned out that he was joining his uncle's office in London from which he would be able to take his finals next year. He was delighted with life. He disliked the architect's office in Brighton where he had not been allowed much scope. Now he was to help with the plans for a huge office building which was to go up on a bombed site in the city.

They chose from the menu.

"Where are you going to live?" asked Frances. "Or are you going to travel up and back every day?"

"No, I'm going to look for a flat. I can't bear digs, I prefer to cook for myself, even if it is over one gas-ring."

"Ah!" said Frances, and proceeded to give him the benefit of her recent, not inconsiderable, experience.

He asked her about her work. She gave him amusing descriptions of everybody but somehow forgot to mention Richard.

"What is it you *do*, exactly?" She explained, but it was another world to him as was his talk of "damp courses" and such-like things to her.

"I met your friend Violetta the other day. At a cocktail party. I liked her very much."

"Did you?" asked Frances, between spoonfuls of peach melba.

"We had a terrific discussion on whether a married woman should have a career or not. She stood out for careers to begin with and then capitulated and said she probably would give hers up if she got married."

"What did you say?"

"I'm afraid I said what I feel, that unless it's financially necessary, a woman with a career endangers the

SIMON

marriage. In fact, I went so far as to say that I would not allow my wife to continue working. I'd want her to run my home beautifully and look after the children."

Frances raised her eyebrows.

"Why, Simon, I'd no idea you had such fixed Victorian ideas."

"What an escape you've had, eh?" he said, laughing. "No, seriously, Frances, I mean it. Perhaps they do seem old-fashioned ideas to you but I feel I'm in the van of a new mode. I've seen so many people whose wives bang in five minutes before dinner and whip up something, practically dying on their feet from fatigue, trying to do both jobs—of home and office—properly, but so often ending by failing in both. If you can afford to have a maid, or if you're exceptionally tough you may manage to get home two seconds before your husband and look as if you've been there all day, fresh and charming and pleased to see him, with a delicious dinner snatched from the deep-freeze, well, if you can manage that—O.K. But there are damn few women who can."

"Contrariwise," said Frances, "what about the women who stay at home all day and only wait for their husbands to arrive in the evening to put out a first-class moan about domestic work which they are already sick of doing?"

"Not my type," said Simon.

"You wait and see," retorted Frances.

Simon laughed. "At all events," he said, taking her arm as they walked out into the Strand, "I shall personally take it upon myself to warn your future husband. Little does the poor man realise that he'll be marrying a ruddy film studio—and if he sees his wife at all, except at weekends, he'll be very lucky."

It was on the tip of Frances' tongue to say, "And

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supposing she marries someone who already works in a film studio, what then?" but she only laughed and said that if he did, she would sue him for defamation of character.

They walked to Charing Cross and said goodbye, each taking a bus in the opposite direction.

Chapter 14

On Location

THE following week they had to go on location to take the scenes of the Whitby country house. It had not been possible to arrange this before owing to various difficulties, one being the owner, Sir Cowdray Davenport, who insisted on being present to see the fun on his return from Denmark where he had been attending a conference and before flying off again to Jamaica. This the studio had agreed to, as the house was so entirely suitable and not too far away.

Frances was thankful it had turned out in this way; had these scenes come in the last week, as they might normally have done, all the studio work usually being done at once, she would have been on her own, as Lena was due to fly to Ceylon in three days' time. As it was, Lena would be coping with the pitfalls of the four rather complicated scenes with quite a large number of extras, Lord Whitby's tenants, guests and staff. This would leave Frances only the one scene to cope with alone, a very much simpler affair to deal with altogether, although she was terrified and got fearful waves of flying Daddy-Long-Legs in her stomach whenever she had time to think about it.

Sir Cowdray proved more of a hindrance than a help. When they all arrived in a fleet of cars and buses, he welcomed them most graciously and told them they could go wherever they liked, and then hovered round all the time they were setting up the outdoor shots, exclaiming: "No, no, you can't put the camera there, sir,

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that's all new grass." Or "I don't think that particular window will open, it's never been open since I've lived here; wouldn't the other window do?" And "For God's sake, mind the hydrangeas." It took them three times as long to take the simplest shot and by lunch time tempers were a bit frayed.

Richard came up to Frances when the lunch break was called and asked her if she'd like to come and have lunch with him in a pub he'd noticed in the village. He put his arm round her neck and smiled down at her. Frances felt strangely fluttery. For the whole of the last week she had felt a tension between them; she always knew where he was in the studio, almost without looking, and felt fairly certain that he was attracted to her.

Lena interrupted rather abruptly.

"You can take us both there," she said firmly, "because I've got to talk to Frances. It's my last chance as I'm having lunch with Mr. Paardin tomorrow."

Richard didn't seem to mind, and they piled into his car.

As it happened, almost everyone else had decided on the same pub. In the scrum, Richard found them two seats in the window of the bar and fought through to them eventually with ham sandwiches and some light ale. Then he went off to foray for himself, and got hemmed in with some of his cronies on the other side of the room.

Lena looked round quickly at their neighbours; they all seemed highly involved with each other and the noise was considerable.

"I've got one or two tips and things to pass on, which I don't seem to have had time to tell you, but first . . ." She hesitated and seemed to make sure that Richard was well out of the way at the bar.

ON LOCATION

"Don't think me a horrid busybody but . . . don't get too fond of Richard."

Frances flushed. Had it been so noticeable then, that she was attracted to him?

Lena looked down at her plate of sandwiches which she held on her knee with one hand.

"He's good fun, and forgive me, please, as it's none of my business, but he has a rather involved private life and I think you should know."

"Tell me, please," said Frances, thinking of the evening he had dropped her at Chalk Farm and talked about his dinner date.

"He has a wife, but he became a Catholic because she was and, of course, Catholics can't get a divorce. It's a very tricky situation. They live apart."

"What happens if he reverts to being a Protestant, or whatever he was before, can he get one then?"

"That's what I don't know," said Lena. "But anyway, it wouldn't count with her as she can never marry again, and I suppose she would not be likely to give her consent. I don't know any more than that, but there it is—it's his problem."

She looked very embarrassed and Frances realised at once that it had cost her something to speak and that it was not the sort of thing she liked doing.

Frances lightly touched her on the arm.

"Thanks," she said. "I'm glad you told me. Now, tell me some ghastly pitfalls I must avoid."

Lena looked relieved.

"Well," she said, reverting to her usual calm and efficient self, "first and most important, *always* have an answer, even if you're not all that sure. You must appear at all times to know what you're doing, even if you don't. Second, never allow any director to bully you. Mr. Paardin is not likely to—he's very charming,

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but some can be tiresome, spoilt and petty. Be sure of yourself, polite and firm. However, your main function is to co-operate to the best of your ability with your director and, as far as possible, you must always be on his side. Don't grumble if he rings you up in the middle of the night to ask you a silly question which could easily have waited until the morning—I've had it happen to me—but they get excited and always want to know everything right away. Your business is to keep calm always, however fierce the maelstrom around you. Don't let anyone panic you, because you then lose all chance of doing your job properly. Ice in the middle of fire is the best way I can think of to describe your proper function."

"I shall be frozen with fright anyway, when you go," said Frances.

Lena laughed and shook her head.

"You'll be O.K. Don't worry if the subtleties of the best places to cut a scene, etc., don't immediately become clear. You'll get this automatically before you've done many pictures. Never, never, be anything but your nice gentle sympathetic self with actors, however much you dislike some particular display of temperament; though mind you," she went on, "you've seen how the professionals are, very clearly, in this film—they do a good job, and there's only room for the best.

"Do you know the famous story about Bette Davis, apropos this? She had a particularly long bit of dialogue in one of her films and she had to break a jug in the middle of it. She'd just done the piece and the director asked her if she could possibly break the jug some five words further on. It was a highly emotional bit of acting, but believe you me, she did the whole piece again, faultlessly, and broke the jug exactly on the required word. That's a 'pro' for you.

ON LOCATION

“One last thing,” said Lena. “About health. There are days when you don’t feel well and you are tempted not to drag yourself to the studio. But you’ve *got* to turn up—it’s more than just the fact that the studio may not be able to get a replacement, it’s a tradition—unless you’re really dying on your feet! I think it’s the iron will to go on which in the end means success at this job. The weaker ones fall by the wayside. I’ve really nothing else to say except that you’ve got to love the job, but I think you do?”

“I adore it,” said Frances. “I think it’s the most wonderful job in the world.” She felt like adding “and I shall die if they chuck me out now, as I’m sure they will when I’ve made a hash of that last scene”, but she did not say it. It didn’t do to convince people that you mistrusted yourself in this particularly competitive world. It was true that only the best was wanted; if you didn’t make the grade you would soon be on your way out.

“What are you two gals gossiping about?” said Richard. “I’ve brought you another sandwich, which I hope you value your figures too much to accept, because I’m starving.”

They laughed and refused, and in a very short time they were back in his car and on their way to the job again.

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The main scene took place in the long drawing-room, which opened on to a terrace through three double doors. It was powerfully lit by the arc-lamps which had been placed out of the range of the camera. The filming equipment looked huge and out of place. Frances noticed the beautiful Aubusson carpet turned back and hoped the wheels of the camera dolly would not

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damage the parquet floor. It was a high-ceilinged room with an enormous fireplace at one end and a grand piano at the other end with a gold stool. Facing the piano were a number of chairs and small sofas placed in groups of four or two, here and there. In these were seated the guests of the Earl and Countess of Whitby. Although it was still daylight outside, the curtains had been drawn as the scene took place at night. They were running well behind schedule, in spite of all their efforts, and at five forty-five, when the working day officially ended, they had to "call the quarter", which meant that from then on they would get pay and a half for every hour they continued working.

There was one small shot, which had been taken, of Lady Whitby standing in the doorway with two cronies, looking furious because her plans for making the actress look out of place had boomeranged. To her intense annoyance, the music she had arranged so that her guests could dance had temporarily been stopped. The pianist and violinist had been led off to the buffet by her husband and, by popular consent, the guests were entertaining themselves. Her young protégée, Helen, daughter of Viscount Broadstairs, had just sung a pretty little drawing-room song in a not very accomplished soprano, accompanied by another guest at the piano. The girl was dressed in an unhappy shade of pink and was a little gauche in manner. Lady Whitby sees what will happen if she doesn't do something quickly; they will clamour for Alicia to sing one of her famous songs from her show, and the contrast between the pretty little amateur and the accomplished and beautiful Alicia will seal the fate of the girl whom Lascelles' mother has already picked as being entirely suitable to be the future Countess of Whitby.

Lady Whitby makes a move towards the piano but

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Lord Whitby is too quick for her, seizes her arm and leads her to an elderly guest who is seated alone on a sofa.

And that is exactly what happens when her back is turned. The next shot is of Alicia laughingly agreeing to sing, and there is a quickening among the guests, a drawing nearer of the chairs.

Alicia sings first the quick little humorous song about the donkey, which was encored three or four times every night by the enthusiastic audience at Drury Lane, and then the more haunting waltz, the theme song of the show.

Alicia had pre-recorded the songs at the studio, as the sound would not have been good enough in the drawing-room for the sound track. But when the director called for the playback, she sang the songs in accompaniment to herself, so that she was singing the right words for the camera. Afterwards the sound and vision would be synchronised.

Anne Ellice's voice was strong and well-trained; she had thought at one time of a musical career, but decided her forte was musical comedy or straight acting. When she had finished the songs, the script called for the audience to applaud with enthusiasm, but the loud and spontaneous outburst was beyond anything that had been rehearsed. Anne flushed with pleasure, only just remembering in time that she had to turn to Lord Whitby when he hurried forward to congratulate her and hand her a glass of champagne. As they had rehearsed it, the scene was to run straight on after the songs to include the short piece of dialogue between the two. This was Lord Whitby's apology, not direct but implied, for his wife's bad behaviour and his own capitulation to her beauty and charm. As it was, he hurried up, carrying the sparkling glass of champagne, which

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had just been poured out behind the scene, and Anne had to collect herself and turn to him. Her hesitation was only of the slightest, as was her slight blush, but it looked delightfully natural.

“Pray that that one’s O.K.,” said Richard to Frances from the camera, when Mr. Paardin had ordered the cut. “If we have, it’s a full-blown peach.”

Chapter 15

Graduation

THE day had come. She was entirely on her own. She was at least ten minutes earlier than usual in her anxiety not to be late, and had to wait for the Green Line bus in the yard at Golders Green station. The play which was on that week at the Hippodrome happened to be called "The Last Look". Was it an omen?

When she got to the set there was a wooden board standing outside the studio door stating that the Director had ordered the set to be "closed", which meant that no one not actually working on the set could come in without the Director's written permission. This, she knew, was often done if the scene to be shot was in any way intimate or difficult, when the presence of strangers might upset the actors.

Inside the studio she passed the large green cupboard on wheels which contained the make-up and found a desk had been put for her alongside it. Arranged in a little brown pot on her desk was a bunch of anemones. A card, stuck up against the jug, said "Good Luck". She thought at first it might be from Richard but then thought it was more likely to be Lena. The card was typed so there was no clue as to whom it was from.

The final scene remaining to be shot was the one, almost at the end of the film, of the meeting between Alicia and Lascelles. She has refused to see him. His letters have never reached her, through the treachery of her dresser who is handsomely in the pay of the

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American producer. There was a previous shot when Lascelles comes to the stage door to see her and is told that she refuses to see him. Lascelles does not believe it and is about to push his way in when the Prince's A.D.C. comes to see Alicia, actually with an invitation to a dinner party for that evening from Mrs. Keppel, but Lascelles thinks that the Prince of Wales has renewed his original interest in her and that she may even be under royal patronage. He walks blindly out and straight into a messenger boy bringing the dozen red roses which he had ordered to be sent to her every week while he was away. The boy hesitates when he sees him, goes on and then runs back.

"M'Lord," he says timidly—he is rather a scruffy Dickensian small boy, "I don't fink the lady gets your flowers, sir. I ain't never allowed past the door." When Lascelles questions him, he discovers that the boy has noticed the stage-door keeper always puts the roses under his table. For a long time he thought it was the custom, but one day he arrived at the same time as another messenger who was allowed to take his bouquet immediately to Alicia's dressing-room. The smart lad waited one day to see if the same thing happened when another messenger came and decided that his bunch never went in. Then follows a chain of events in which Lascelles discovers what has been going on, but Alicia still refuses to see him. Her last night at Drury Lane is spectacular. Among the many bouquets thrown to her is one with a card written by Lascelles' father, the Earl of Whitby. It asks her to spare him a moment only after the show at Rules Restaurant in Maiden Lane. It is on her way to the Savoy where the members of the company are giving a huge dinner party for her on her last night.

The card was indeed written by Lord Whitby, who

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knows she would not refuse to see him as they had become great friends at the house-party, but it is Lascelles who is waiting for her in the upstairs room, the little private room where many famous people of the day used to dine *à deux* with a beautiful actress.

The scene was small. The three sides of the room included the door, leading in from the top of the stairs, a table, in front of a wall seat, laid for dinner, gleaming with white, silver and reflecting crystal. The colour scheme of the room was a rich red, the walls, hangings and upholstered chairs and wall seats all echoed this red, the Victorian restaurant colour *par excellence*.

Two men were putting the finishing touches to a large bowlful of flowers on a small table, which stood inside the screen leading to the service door.

Frances glanced again at the scene in her script. She had three people's clothes to check, the waiter, Lascelles and Alicia. She went over to the serving table to check the various items. Through the service door, one of the props men was struggling with the cork of a bottle of champagne to ease it a little so that the waiter could open it more smoothly on the set.

Mr. Paardin appeared.

"Think you can manage all right?" he asked her. He looked preoccupied.

Frances said she very much hoped so, in so fervent a tone that Mr. Paardin looked up to stare at her full in the face for almost the first time.

"You can do it," he said, and smiled at her. Frances felt a rush of confidence, even though she was aware that Mr. Paardin knew to the last degree how to get the best out of people. He was not a great director for nothing.

The scene was lit, the stand-ins waiting patiently in the full glare of the lights while the camera was set up

CONTINUITY GIRL

and the distance measured between the camera and the actors. After shooting the scene straight through they would take the close-ups. Frances went through in her mind all the snags and possible mistakes she must watch out for. Everyone on the set seemed keyed up. It was a difficult scene which had to be built out of almost nothing; it all hung on how it was played, the timing and the right emotion.

When Anne Ellice came out of her dressing-room she looked nervous.

"It would be this morning of all mornings that I have the grimmest headache," she said to Frances, who was making notes on her costume.

"Let me get you an aspirin," said Frances.

"I daren't take any more or I shall play the scene like a drug addict."

Richard Todd overheard her.

"Champagne's the thing, duckie. Props!" he shouted. "Bring a little of that bubbly over here."

The first shot was Lascelles walking agitatedly up and down the room, smoking furiously. Will Alicia come, or won't she? Will she ignore his father's message or will she accede to its request, even on a night such as this one, the height of her career so far. Lascelles had been out in front and heard the storm of applause and cheers she had just received in the theatre. He believes she cannot be in love with him, that she must think he never wrote to her because he had thought better of making her the future Countess of Whitby, or that, after all, the call of her career and the glittering promise of reaching the zenith of success in New York have put such a small thing as marriage out of her mind. The script had been cleverly written; in this last scene there was an echo of a problem which was right up to date—the arguments for and against

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a career for a woman versus marriage. Which would she choose?

They rehearsed the main scene right through. Alicia arrives. Standing in the doorway she realises it is Lascelles, not his father, who is waiting to see her. She looks dismayed, puzzled and angry by turns. Her first words were, "I leave for New York on Thursday." He tells her it is out of the question. The waiter, who puts his head round the door to bring the menu, takes it out again swiftly when he hears their angry voices. The two stand facing each other in the middle of the room, Alicia still with her hands in her elegant muff.

"You would prefer to be a comedy actress than my wife?"

Alicia explodes with fury.

"You are as disgracefully prejudiced as the rest of your family. No, I don't choose to 'lower' your family pride, or throw my career to the winds." She walked angrily past him as she said this, wheeled round and came back to Lascelles who had been forced to turn round to face her.

"Why did you do that?" Mr. Paardin asked her.
"By instinct?"

"I don't know. It was unconscious."

"I think it's good. We'll leave it in."

The tension mounted. Frances glanced at her watch, she knew Mr. Paardin was anxious to begin shooting before eleven-thirty and time was getting on. Anne Ellice was very nervous indeed and made one or two speech faults.

At last everything seemed ready for a take. Frances did not have time to think of her own reactions and fears. She was too busy. She noticed the service door behind the screen, which was just visible, was open and stepped across the set to shut it. She checked that the

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wine which Lascelles had been drinking in the first shot was topped up to the exact level it had been when the shot was cut. She noticed that the cigarette he had been smoking was shorter than the one he now had. Without thinking, she suddenly said to Mr. Paardin, "Wouldn't Lascelles put his cigarette out immediately he hears Alicia coming? I believe in those days it was not considered polite to smoke in front of ladies."

"Good Lord, yes," said Michael Stein. "I remember my grandfather telling me he literally had to smoke up the chimney so that my grandmother should not detect the smell of smoke!" Mr. Paardin agreed.

"Right. Let's go," he said briskly, and stepped back to his place beside the camera. Frances stood beside him, her new stop-watch in her hand, the script open on her arm.

"This is it. Red light," called Michael.

The bell rang, and the now familiar formula began.

"O.K., Dick?"

"O.K., Mike."

"Quiet then. Here we go. Turn over!"

"Six-fifty-three, take one."

"Action!"

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Richard gave her a lift after the day was successfully completed. Frances felt everything had gone fairly well, but she had no idea whether she had made any mistakes or not. Mr. Paardin had thanked her just before he left for a party which he was giving for the principals, but she couldn't be sure whether she had gained his approval or not. The takes had all gone as smoothly as could be expected, and Mr. Paardin had behaved rather like a boy let out of school when they had seen the rushes. She gathered that there was to be a farewell

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party for everyone who had taken part in the film, actors, crew, extras and all, on the following Monday, and she had been told by someone in Publicity that she would be sent a ticket for the première when it took place in London three months hence. Otherwise it all suddenly seemed to be disintegrating—the excitement, the nerves and the atmosphere which had been built up so strongly between them all. She leant her elbows on the bar of the pub where Richard had brought her on the way home and felt extraordinarily nostalgic. It was strange that all those talents which had been fused together to create something should now be blown apart simply by the passing of time. They had all concentrated together and out of it had made something that was more than friendship between them. Now they were scattering and already, each individual was slipping away to new enthusiasms, new bases of work and friendship.

"What are you thinking about, sweetie?" asked Richard as he ordered some more drinks.

"Tell me again," said Frances. "Do you really think that I didn't put up any blacks?"

He grinned down at her, propping his leg on the bar of her stool. "Well, apart from one or two mistakes which will cost the company a fortune . . ."

Frances laughed. She suddenly felt gay.

"Well, if I never see the inside of a studio again, it was worth it."

"It certainly was from my point of view," he said seriously, toasting her with his glass.

They went on to dinner. He took her, dressed just as she was, to the Coq d'Or. He refused to take her home first to change as he said they were on the crest of a mood and mustn't break it. Frances was caught by the mood, too, and forgot her black skirt and dark

CONTINUITY GIRL

grey sweater which she had been wearing all day, especially when Richard bought her two yellow roses to pin on her shoulder.

"This is mad," she thought, "but irresistible, and after Monday I shall probably never see him again."

Later that evening he told her all about his marriage, but he did not seek sympathy, neither did he attempt to flirt with her. Frances felt she liked him enormously and that it was, perhaps, quite a good thing that the film had come to an end. She tried to compare him in her mind with Simon, but it was no good. Simon meant one way of life, Richard another, but which sort of future she belonged to she could not then say. It was too soon. Only time would tell and she refused to worry about it.

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She woke next morning to the noise of the telephone. She had slept heavily, because Richard had not brought her back until two in the morning. She was sure the bell had been ringing for some time before it woke her to full consciousness. She scrambled out of bed to answer it, her dressing-gown wrapped round her as she could not find the sleeves.

"Hello, is that Miss Frances Milne?"

"Yes, who is that?"

She looked at her watch, it was only five past eight.

"This is Jerry Spencer of Kenilworth Films. I don't know if Miss Burrows said anything to you yesterday but there's a continuity job open which might interest you. It's our Second Unit which goes on location in Trinidad in five days. Can you make it?"

"I—er—yes, of course."

"Good. You'll need some tropical clothes. I've got some expense money for you and I suggest you meet

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Edwina Monk, my assistant, in about an hour's time, if that suits you, and she can give you some advice on what to get. Could you meet her in the Piccadilly Hotel at nine—Piccadilly entrance?"

"Yes," said Frances, her mind whirling.

She said goodbye mechanically and then began to think of a hundred questions she wanted to ask. But it was too late, the telephone the other end had been put down and there was nothing on the line.

She put her receiver back and struggled into her dressing-gown.

Suddenly she gave a great shout of joy and twisted herself round in the middle of the room. Did this mean she was a fully-fledged continuity girl? If she kept her wits, did this mean that she could go on from job to job, or was it just another lucky break?

She put the kettle on to make tea and ran her bath.

Her mind began to work faster and faster. There was not much time. How long would she be away? What about her dentist's appointment? Passport! Was it up to date? How much money would she be able to spend? Would her salary be the same? Who was the director? Who the stars?

Five days!

She concentrated on getting dressed quickly and swallowing a cup of coffee and some toast. If a bus came up at once she could be in Piccadilly in fifteen minutes. Time was getting on. I must make a list, she thought, of all the things I've got to do: see the family, arrange about the flat—I suppose I can manage to keep it on—do I go by air? Do I have to have innoculations? I'll have to buy a new suitcase. . . .

She shut the flat and ran for the bus. She just made it and, panting, handed her money to the conductor.

CONTINUITY GIRL

"You shouldn't run like that," he said reprovingly, "there's plenty more buses behind me."

"I wanted this one," said Frances.

"They're all the same," he said, and went on down the bus to collect his fares.

Frances could not agree. You had to run after things and take leaps in this life, she decided, it was no good being too careful. "I'm off to Trinidad!" she thought. And felt she would have to scream it out to all the patient-looking passengers. How wonderfully exciting life was!

The bus turned down Shaftesbury Avenue, swung into Piccadilly Circus towards Piccadilly and her future.



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